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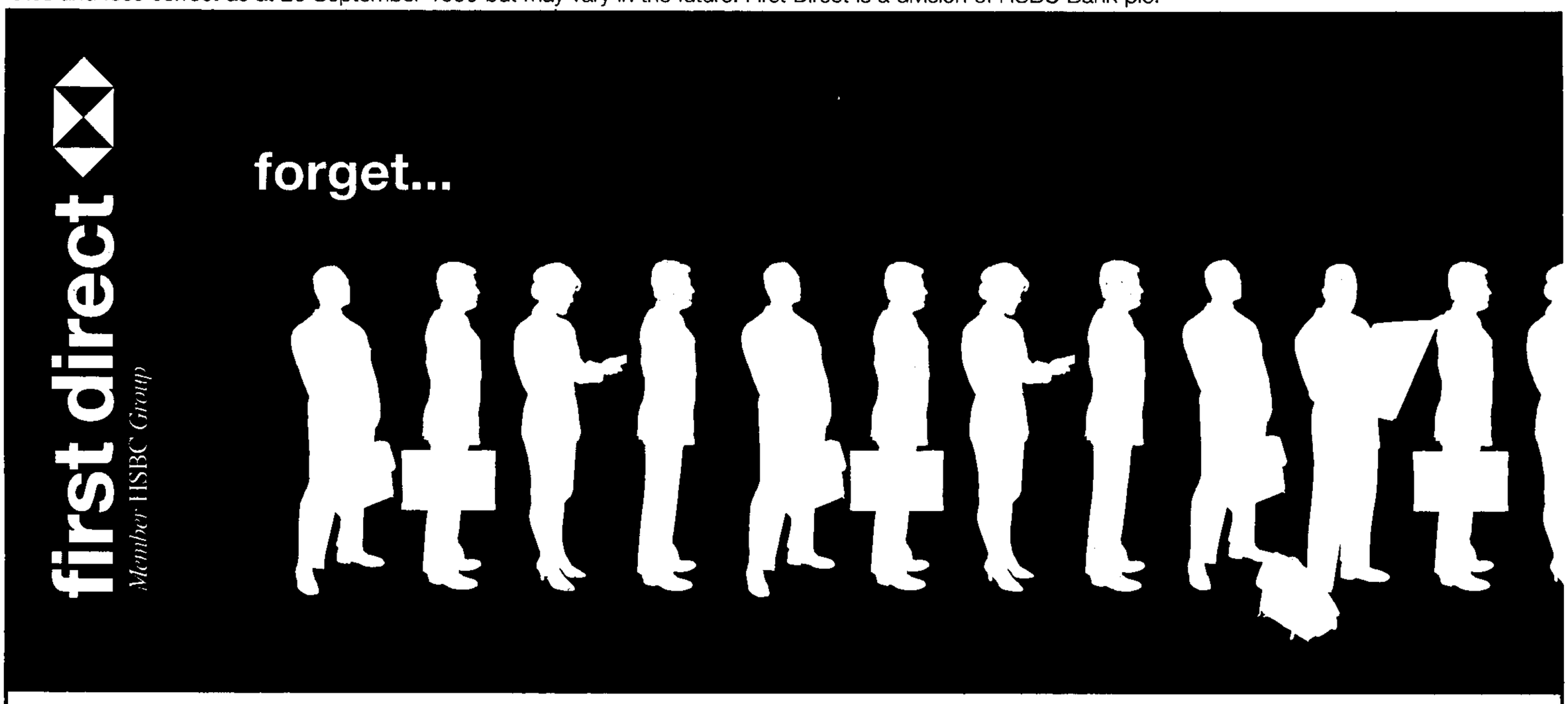

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GRAHAM'S

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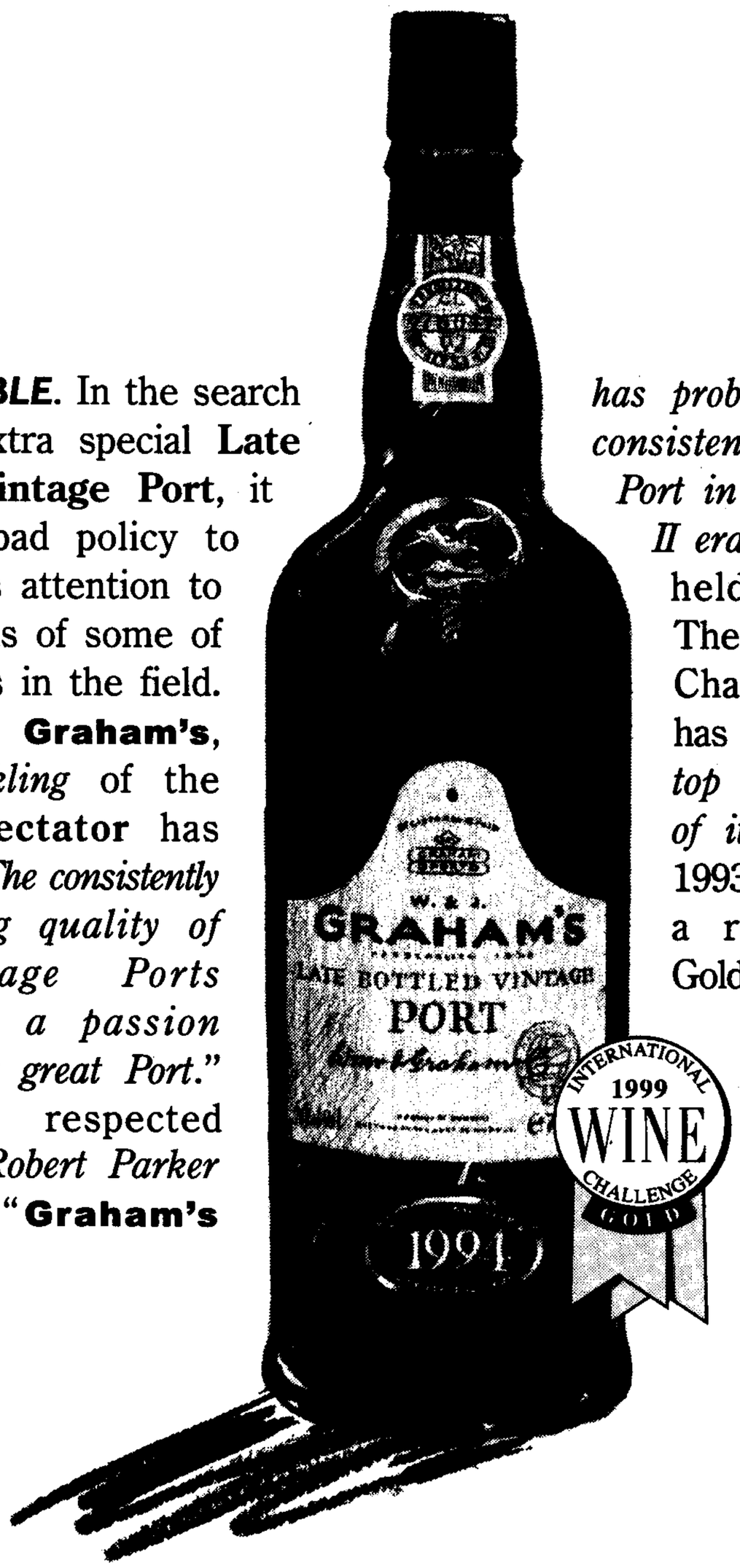

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I WAS appalled this week by the government's refusal to allow the free prescription on the NHS of the drug Expenza — a first-rate product from the pharmaceutical arm of my company, Gnoxo International.

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Wide-ranging tests have shown conclusively that large sales of this drug would immediately result in healthy profits for myself.

If the government will not sell Expenza, then, as a patriotic businessman, I will have no option but to leave Britain, close my factories and make my entire workforce redundant — as a result of which they will become stressed, ill and flu-ridden, causing extra strain on the NHS, which will bring the whole health service crashing to its knees.

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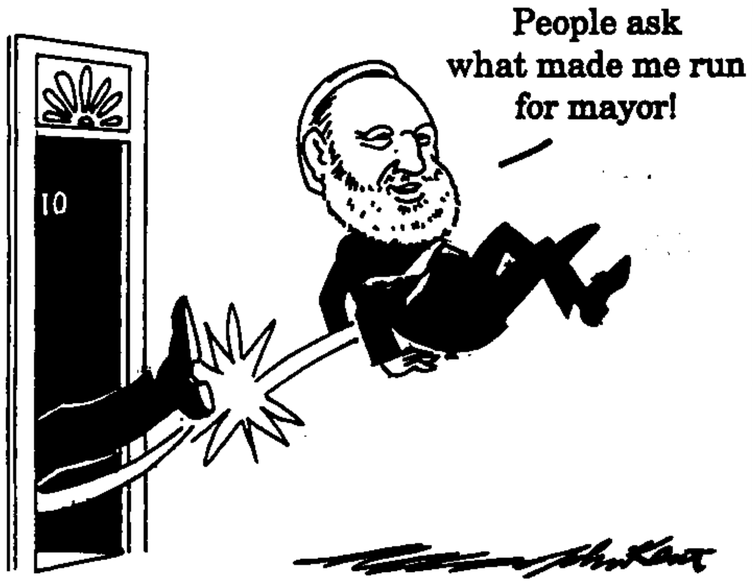

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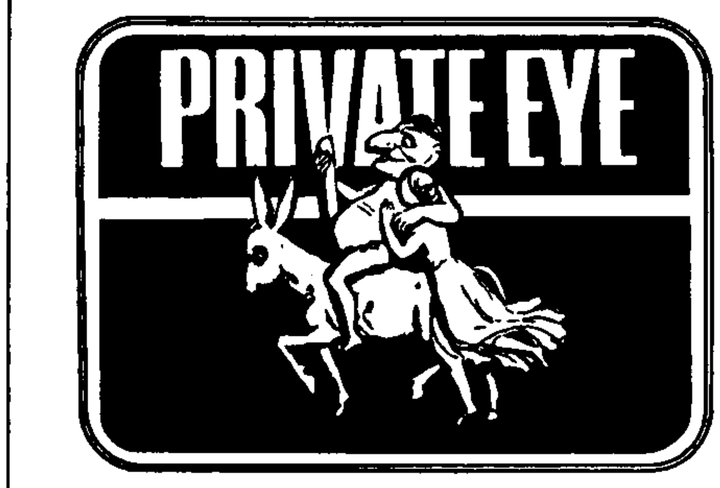

COLOUR SECTION

THE "Mouth of the Humber", aka the "Fat Controller", aka deputy prime minister John Prescott needs all the friends he can muster.

Having just survived his summer roasting courtesy of Labour colleague Gwyneth Dunwoody – who came armed with a devastating transport select committee investigation into his department's activities (or lack of them) – Prescott has been floundering in the aftermath of the grisly Paddington train smash.

Before the general election he delivered much bombast on the need for "an integrated transport policy" while thrashing out at the Tories for their "disastrous rail privatisation policy". Under Labour, Prescott promised, the railways would be "publicly run and publicly accountable." Yet under Prescott the railways have carried on much as before, except with even more delays, falling investment and bigger profits for the privatised rail chiefs.

Until Paddington Prescott was preparing to hand over yet *more* infrastructure to Railtrack, the company responsible for signal 109 at Ladbroke Grove, via a "Public Private Partnership" arrangement for the fast collapsing London Underground. In the old days when Prezza used to talk about "partnership" between public and private, he was simply advocating a new ability for British Rail or London Underground to borrow money on the open market rather than depend on the treasury if they wanted new rolling stock. But the "PPP" scheme dreamed up for the London Underground by former treasury minister Geoffrey Robinson was nothing more than a plan to partially privatise the Underground while pretending to the noted anti-privatisation deputy prime minister that it was no such thing.

With his cover blown by Paddington, Prescott's media performance in the immediate aftermath of the disaster was lamentable. So much so that junior transport minister Lord "Gus" MacDonald had to be wheeled out to make suitably contrite noises. As it emerged that the previous administration had, post Southall, failed to enforce the application of Automatic Train Protection (ATP) throughout the network on grounds of cost, it also became blindingly obvious that Labour had not done so either.

Neither had Labour helped bring Britain's rail safety record up to the same standards of, say, backward Spain or Italy. Now money is no object – post Paddington – even if it costs, according to Prescott, "£1 billion". At last – and at the very least – all locos will probably be fitted with ATP. But with that other privatisation, air traffic control, now on hold, what of the partial tube sell off? An announcement was due to be made this week on preferred bidders.

What moreover of John Prescott, the politician who exhorted the public to go public and use the railway or the underground, but then hopped into his ministerial Jag for a 200-yard trip along the Bournemouth prom? His new "friends" will delight in his discomfiture, while his old mates in the PLP and the RMT may shake their heads and say sadly and quietly: "There goes John."

BARELY three months back a ferocious Frank Dobson appeared on the nation's television and radio sets to deny he had any intention of standing for mayor of London.

Those who were pushing this story in the newspapers were, according to the splenetic health supremo, "simply liars!" But now "Dobbo" has been gently "persuaded" by the PM that it is either mayor or nothing; and the old beardie has been happy to allow friends such as his PPS, Ann Keen MP, and "new" Labour hard man Tony McNulty MP, to brief the media on his behalf.

Just the sort of activity then that Frank so heartily disapproved of not so very long ago.

DOBSON's heroic declaration that he is to throw his hat in the ring for London mayor is, ironically, good news for Ken Livingstone.

Had "Dobbo" refused to budge, the London Labour party selection panel would have been instructed to bar Leninspart from standing. Now "Dobbo" has been persuaded to stand, Plan B is likely to be put into action. This allows the hated Leninspart to stand, while selectively leaking the contents of Millbank's painstakingly researched Excalibur file on the former GLC leader.

Assisting Number 10 in the "de-fenestrate Red Ken" project will be the usual toadying lobby hacks alongside former political allies of Leninspart, such as Barking MP Margaret "Enver" Hodge. "Enver", who in another incarnation flew the red flag from Islington town hall during her unlamented tenure as leader of the benighted borough.

She has already denounced Leninspart for once describing Welsh windbag Neil Kinnock as a "bastard" after one particularly tired and emotional Labour NEC meeting. Students of Labour history determined to ascertain what opinion, if any, "Enver" may herself have offered on Labour's former leader, might be advised to consult back copies of the spartite London Labour Left *Briefing* magazine. For "Enver" was for some years a star columnist and a noted critic of the "boyo's" deluded attempts to inject some sanity into the crazed London Labour party of the 1980s.

NO ONE can accuse John Prescott of not leading by example.

After Two Jags used a chauffeur-driven car in preference to walking 250 yards at the Labour party conference, civil servants at the department of environment, transport and the regions were hardly surprised to see Sir Trevor Chinn, vice-chairman of the Prescott's new commission for integrated transport quango, turning up for meetings in... a chauffeur-driven Volvo.

- *Wreaths on the line: Signal Failures special 6, 7*
- *Hackwatch on the conversion of St Paul 9*
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"I hope he doesn't expect us to do anything unnatural – like shaking hands."

WREATHS ON THE LINE

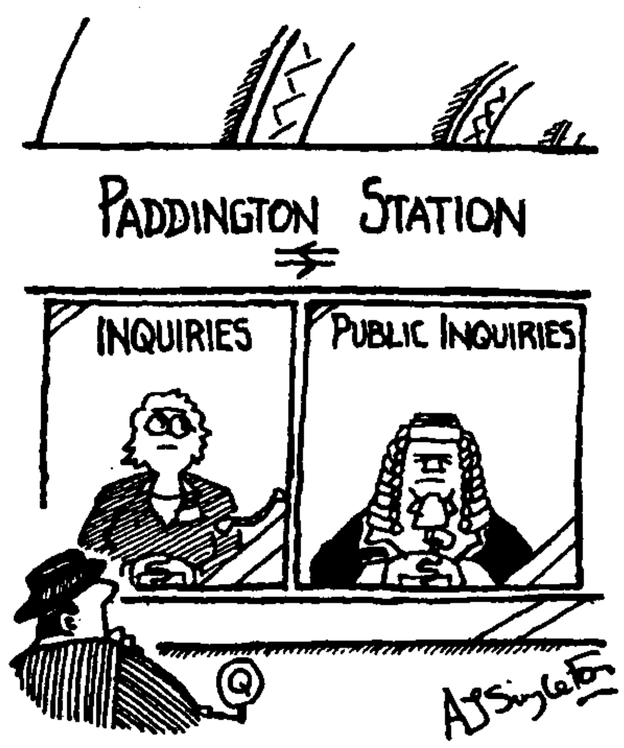
MOST people who were asked to comment on the Paddington crash shortly after it happened were tactful, sympathetic and careful not to point fingers before the causes were known. But not the Tories.

Within hours of the accident, shadow transport secretary John Redwood saw the chance to gain political ground and jumped in feet first with a demand to know: "Why it is that the government has done nothing following the last disaster on this stretch of track." *The man's gall is gobsmacking.*

Whatever happened in west London on the morning of 5 October, the buck stops with the Conservatives. It was they who destabilised a long-established safety regime where British Rail took sole responsibility for operation and was closely watched by an independent railway inspectorate. They cannot plead ignorance now that a huge disaster has happened, as they were warned repeatedly by experienced British Rail managers before and during privatisation. One of those managers, senior operations director Peter Rayner, even lost his job because of his warnings about safety; afterwards he was simply dismissed as a scaremonger by Tory transport minister Roger Freeman.

The Tories were mildly criticised after last week's crash for their sins over Automatic Train Protection (ATP), the device recommended in the 1989 report on the Clapham Junction crash to stop trains passing red signals. Back in 1995, *Private Eye* drew attention to the fact that the five deaths at Cowden the previous year would have been avoided had the Tories stuck to Cecil Parkinson's promise when, as transport secretary, he said: "Finance will not stand in the way of the implementation of the report." Sadly, our observation then is now a familiar refrain after so many incidents that ATP would have prevented.

The scandal of ATP, however, is not the Tories' worst crime against rail safety. Breaking promises, even on life-and-death issues, is normal behaviour for politicians. Some safety experts advised that ATP was too expensive for the benefits it would deliver because it would not have prevented British Rail's worst accidents in the 1980s, at Clapham, Falkirk and Lockington. What those experts failed to foresee, though, was a time when the traditional safety culture would become so diluted that the railway would depend on automatic catch-all devices to maintain its safety record.



The twin processes of fragmentation and privatisation are the causes of that dilution. Previously rail safety was based on military practice, with clear lines of command and responsibility running from top to bottom. As the *Eye* warned (934), fragmentation blurred those lines by spreading responsibility across dozens of companies. Privatisation then piled new commercial and legal pressures on safety-related activities and stifled the open and frank discussion which used to follow every accident.

Responsibility is divided not just between infrastructure owner Railtrack and the 29 train operators; numerous other companies are contracted by the main ones to provide various services. Railtrack entrusts all its maintenance and repair work to an army of contractors, many of whom have shown a weak grasp of safety procedures from the word go.

In Railtrack's early days the *Eye* highlighted numerous disturbing examples of contractors' naiveté which came to us via leaked Railtrack logs. Railtrack's response, in 1995, was to shoot the messenger.

"Following a number of leaks to the press, Railtrack wish to control the availability of the log more tightly," read a memo which was immediately leaked to the *Eye*. So much for open discussion of safety. Four years later the situation was so bad, with Railtrack contractors being fined for serious safety breaches, that both the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) and the Commons transport select committee ordered Railtrack to tighten its control.

Every private rail company will publicly insist that its top priority is safety, when it is obvious that carrying passengers or goods and carrying them safely are simply a means to satisfying shareholders. Between them, the private companies took about £1bn in profits last year. If safety always came before money, they would have spent that money on safety measures like ATP (which, coincidentally, is now costed at about £1bn).

The following extract about financial pressures from *Eye* 889 in January 1996 makes interesting reading against the background of the Southall inquiry:

"Until now a driver who suspects his train may be on fire or falling to bits has had no qualms about stopping the train and getting it examined. On today's railway, his company will have to pay compensation to Railtrack if train failure results in delays and inconvenience to other litigious rail businesses. Compensation will be demanded even if the train was stopped for safety reasons. However strenuously the rail businesses deny that safety will be undermined, the compensation culture will inevitably provide an incentive for drivers to keep going with fingers crossed if they suspect a fault."

Eighteen months later, seven people died in the Southall crash after a high-speed train was used in public service with its basic safety systems inoperable.

Commercial pressure, a predictable result of privatisation, was not in itself a reason against privatising BR in some form — it simply meant safety regulation would have to be doubly strict. In the event, however, regulation was *weakened*.

Even before privatisation was planned, the Tories made two damaging changes to safety regulation. One was to transfer the railway inspectorate to the auspices of the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), where bureaucrats were put in charge instead of the military officers who had for decades exercised a large degree of independence and commanded the respect of management and trade unions alike.

The other change was to allow criminal proceedings against train drivers to take precedence over the inquiry which was previously the immediate priority after an accident. Suddenly retribution was more important than rectification. Initially this scapegoat-finding was popular, but now the press and public are furious that the lessons of Southall appear not to have been learned in 1997 because of impending prosecutions.

We made this point back in June 1998 (*Eye* 952) after the report on the Watford crash made 21 safety recommendations for rail companies:

"Because of the perverse system which prosecutes the driver before the report is published, almost two years may have passed since the crash before the companies deal with faults which should have been rectified within weeks or months. A similar shambles will dog the eventual Southall crash inquiry. The HSE will not make its recommendations until after the driver has been tried next year. In the meantime some of the factors which contributed to the accident may continue at various locations across the network."

Prophetic words, one might think, given the apparent similarities between the Southall and Paddington crashes. But Vic Coleman, the HSE's deputy chief inspector of railways, didn't think so. He responded in a letter to the *Eye*: "I have to tell you that Dr B. Ching is on the wrong track." He implied that all the factors responsible for Southall had been addressed immediately; if that was the case, why is an expensive and emotionally tiring public inquiry now being conducted?

The *Eye* had already questioned the HSE's attitude in January 1998 (*Eye* 942), warning of the damaging consequences of a safety body becoming blasé. We expressed surprise that the HSE believed rail safety had improved when its own annual report showed otherwise. In the report the HSE said some rail companies were basing their safety policies on "a purely historical view of incidents" instead of "the potential for harm"; some were using statistics to justify "reducing the level of safety already provided". Our article observed: "Another point needing attention is that of trains passing red signals."

That article drew a patronising response from SSJ Robertson, HSE's chief inspector of railways. Taking his cue from the rail companies his own annual report had criticised, he used a purely historical view of incidents (quoting figures like rail deaths and falls from train doors the previous year) to contradict our argument that the potential for harm had increased.

The problem with basing sweeping conclusions on recent figures is that many safety breaches on the railway do not, through sheer good luck, result in deaths or injuries. But rail safety should not depend on luck. We have reported in the last few years on three instances where mis-wired signals (the cause of the Clapham crash) had given trains a green or amber light to run on to the wrong tracks. None of those incidents was fatal, through good fortune, but in at least one case the potential for harm — the only thing that should matter to the HSE — was comparable to the potential realised at Paddington last week. The same is true of the crash at Winsford last June, when an

THEN AND NOW

"Nowadays much care is spent on choosing the location and height of the signals, so as to give an unobstructed view to the driver."

— *The Railways of Britain*, by O.S. Nock, 1947.

"Drivers and train companies have made a series of complaints about signal 109, which they say is too difficult for drivers to see. It has featured in eight incidents in the past six years but Railtrack failed to take action, rail unions claimed yesterday."

— *The Guardian*, 7 October 1999.

WHAT LABOUR SAID... on network safety

WHEN the public inquiry set up by a hand-wringing John Prescott ponders the policy implications of the Paddington rail disaster, it could do worse than consider a prophetic article from the *Times* of 25 August 1995.

"Privatisation is bad for safety," it warned. "When two trains approach each other on the same line, it is too late to argue about the precise terms of the contract between purchaser and provider... Railtrack is plainly ill-equipped to deal with its safety duties... Railtrack's managers have admitted to each other, if not the public, that key recommendations of the Clapham and Newton Junction inquiries had been ignored... A single management control system must be restored to the network. And commercial cost-cutting at the expense of service quality must be ended. Unfortunately for the Conservatives, neither is compatible with privatisation."

Unfortunately for "new" Labour, the author of these prescient words was the then shadow transport secretary Michael Meacher. His reward for getting it right? Tony Blair shoved him out of the job a few months later because Meacher refused to say that Labour would never renationalise the railways.

Luckily John Prescott has already announced that privatisation had nothing whatever to do with the Paddington smash. So that's all right then.

A Signal Failures Special

express ran a considerable distance into one of the appalling bus-type "Pacer" trains; deaths (which could easily have run into double figures) were avoided because the "Pacer" was empty and the express driver had enough warning to brake sharply.

Another fatal flaw introduced by the Tories was entrusting Railtrack with the safe operation of the railway. Originally Railtrack was to have remained in the state sector; in the terrific rush to privatise it before Labour came to office, the Tory administration gave no thought to the implications of a shareholder-driven company carrying such a huge public responsibility. The results are now well known. For example, in May (977) the *Eye* showed how Railtrack had completely ignored a detailed study of decaying signal cables conducted for BR in 1992. Instead of carrying out the recommended programme of urgent renewals, Railtrack introduced a policy of tolerating the dilapidation. It has got away with cost-cutting in the most crucial safety system of all because it regulates its own activities.

Now there is anger and disbelief that the signal over-run at Ladbroke Grove has been passed at red repeatedly — as have many other signals in the country — but Railtrack failed to take appropriate action. Why the surprise?

In June 1998 (*Eye* 952) we reported: "The jury that acquitted the Watford driver in March accepted that flawed infrastructure played a large part in the crash. The jury was told the critical signal at Watford had been passed at danger several times previously and that Railtrack had also known about an undersize safety overlap at the location for several years. But... the HSE has decided there is insufficient evidence of regulations being breached to justify legal proceedings against any rail business."

Great energies were devoted to trying to pin the blame on the train driver (who was acquitted) and none to pinning the blame on Railtrack, which then did not bother to tackle the problem of signals repeatedly passed at red. Already one such signal, at Watford, had contributed to a passenger's death but the HSE and Railtrack did not heed the warning: they were taking a purely historical view of the phenomenon (just one death) and not its potential for harm (now demonstrated by the multiple deaths at Paddington).

Whatever the causes of the Paddington crash turn out to be, responsibility runs much deeper than issues like driver error or equipment faults. Below the surface there is a rotten safety culture which must be addressed. Fragmentation and privatisation weakened railway safety, but instead of compensating for that with tighter regulation and ATP the Tories compounded the problems.

Last August (*Eye* 983) we pointed out that the present government was still turning a blind eye by not including in the new railways bill the transfer of Railtrack's safety remit to an independent body. Under pressure after Paddington, the government has agreed to make that change. What a shame so many people had to die before action was taken to correct this and many other shortcomings exposed long before the Paddington accident.

'Dr B. Ching'

WHAT LABOUR SAID... on privatisation

"Let me make it crystal clear that any privatisation of the railway system that does take place will, on the arrival of a Labour government, be quickly and effectively dealt with, with the full support of the community, and be returned to public ownership."

— John Prescott, Labour's transport spokesman, Labour party conference, 1993.

"The privatised railway is producing windfall profits for a few people as a result of the contracts awarded by the last government. There's nothing I can do about that."

— John Prescott, deputy prime minister and secretary of state for transport, the environment and the regions, quoted in the *Daily Telegraph*, 27 March 1998.

WHAT LABOUR SAID... on train protection

1989: Clapham rail disaster inquiry recommends installation within five years of Automatic Train Protection (ATP) to stop trains jumping red lights.

1995: Tories abandon scheme because of £1bn costs.

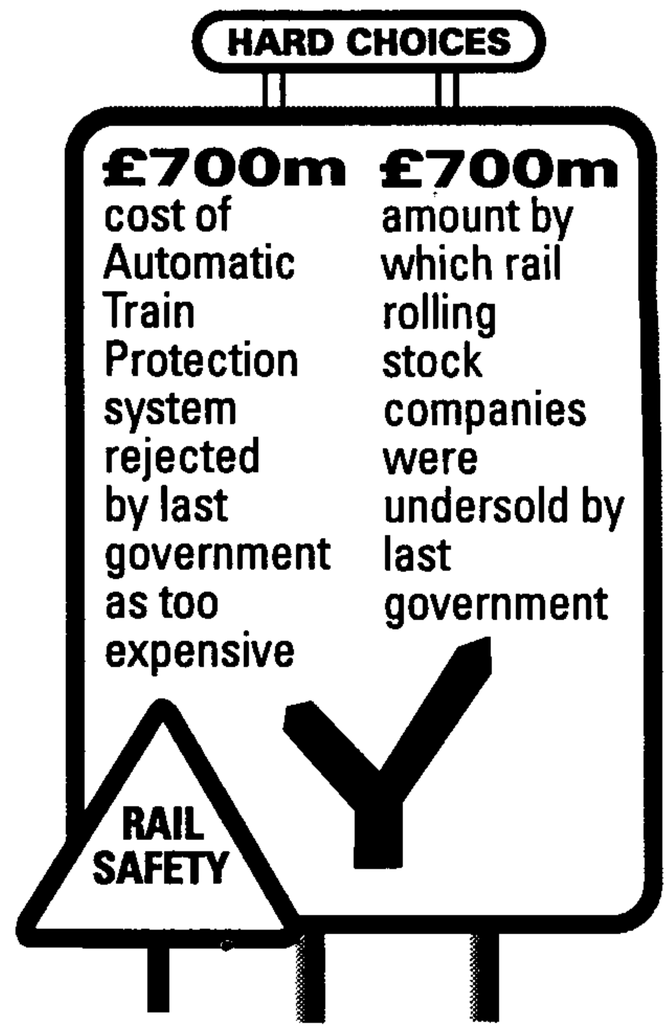
21 September 1997: Two days after the Southall train crash, John Prescott, Labour's new transport secretary, tells the Observer: "I hope that an inquiry in the full glare of publicity will closely examine the role of ATP in this accident. We said in opposition that we thought installation of ATP should have been made a condition of granting safety certificates. I want the safest rail industry possible – whatever the implications."

Summer 1999: Prescott announces that he will introduce Train Protection Warning System (TPWS), described by critics as "the poor man's ATP" within five years.

22 September 1999: The Southall train crash inquiry hears that Prescott's cheaper TPWS will not prevent a collision if the trains are travelling faster than 70mph when they approach a danger signal.

29 September 1999: Prescott tells the Labour party conference in Bournemouth: "For too long politicians have dodged longterm responsibility for short term expediency...

"And let's be clear about this. Whether it's air traffic or anywhere else I will never agree to anything that would put safety at risk... I do take exception to suggestions that I might be soft on safety... From Lockerbie to Clapham junction, I hounded the Tories... I will never, I repeat, never, play games with people's safety. And I deplore those who seek to stir up safety for ideological or industrial ends."


HARD CHOICES
£700m cost of Automatic Train Protection system rejected by last government as too expensive
£700m amount by which rail rolling stock companies were undersold by last government
RAIL SAFETY

THE OPERATORS

WITH Railtrack taking much of the heat off John Prescott, less attention has been paid to the fat cat train millionaires who were created by the sale of the two companies involved at Paddington.

THAMES TRAINS

This small London-to-Oxford railway was snapped up after privatisation in October 1996 by Victory Railways. Five rather ordinary executives, mostly from British Rail, took 25 percent of the new company's shares. They were Roger McDonald, managing director; Nick Illsley, commercial director; Chris Scanlon, finance director; Kevin Harrison, human resources director; and David Franks, production director.

The five paid a paltry £10,000 for their shares. Seventeen months later, in March 1998, there was no noticeable improvement in the punctuality or frequency of the service, but somehow Victory managed to squeeze £750,000 profit from the line (which is still being subsidised by the taxpayer to the tune of £18m a year).

The bus group Go-Ahead was enormously impressed by these figures and successfully bid £6m for Victory. The Fortunate Five pocketed £4.3m — £875,000 each. McDonald, Scanlon, Harrison and Franks resigned from the board soon afterwards. Nick Illsley became an important person at the Association of Rail Operating Companies. You can see him on the telly from time to time nervously answering questions about the Paddington disaster, and somehow avoiding any mention of the huge sum he pocketed from being a director of one of the companies involved.

GREAT WESTERN TRAINS

Massive though these windfalls were, they were chicken feed compared with what happened at Great Western Trains, which ran the fatal intercity expresses at Southall and at Paddington.

In the same month that Go-Ahead took over Victory, the biggest bus group in the country, modestly calling itself First, put up £140m for Great Western Trains. Up to then, the parent firm and its rail subsidiary had been run by some rather ordinary executives (some of them from British Rail): Brian Scott, Richard George, Mike Carroll, John Sellers, Ian Cusworth, John McCallion, Barbara Salter, Phillipa Sondheimer and Barry Wood.

The chairman of Great Western Holdings, who was also chairman of the huge combine Aggregate Industries, was Maurice Warren, and the board was joined by Ann Robinson, former director of the Institute of Directors, who now chairs the National Association of Pension Funds. Apart from the usual sacking of drivers, absolutely nothing was done to improve the service or the punctuality of Great Western Trains, which had one of the worst records in the network.

Nevertheless, GWT managed to squeeze £5m profit from its crumbling service, and to forecast another £25m profit the following year. Even though the taxpayer was subsidising the company by £50m a year, this forecast appealed a lot to a minority shareholder, First Group, and its bustling chief executive Moir Lockhead. They bought the shares they didn't already own for £105m. The pay-out to the directors was embarrassing. Brian Scott got £3.7m; Richard George £3m; Carroll, Sellers and Cusworth £2.2m; Warren £1.85m; Robinson £370,000; McCallion and Salter £2.2m each; Philippa Sondheimer and Barry Wood £1.5m each. Thus the directors who had bought their shares for £340,000 sold them less than 18 months later, without a single noticeable improvement in the service, for £23m.

Naturally, after such a windfall they were inclined to lose interest in the rail industry. Scott, Cusworth, Warren, McCallion, Sondheimer, Salter and Wood, all new rail millionaires, have resigned. Richard George and Mike Carroll hung on. George was recommended by British Transport Police to be prosecuted for his role in the Southall disaster, but the recommendation was not accepted by the DPP. There were no criminal prosecutions of individuals, though after a prosecution by the Health & Safety Executive GWT was fined £1.5m, exactly half what Mr George alone made from the sale of his shares to First Group.

The First Group takeover was carried out under the slogan: QUALITY FIRST. "Our aim," said the company statement, "is to provide a superior quality of service for all our customers."

Street Of Shame

RUPERT MURDOCH's generosity to employees knows no bounds.

For the past three years eligible staff at News International have shared in a *taxable* profit-related bonus, based on an agreed formula of redistributing one half of 1 percent of NI profits. For 1997 the bonus was about £230 per person, and for 1998 it was £290. This year, however, the company will pay a slightly reduced bonus of £276, reflecting "pressures the business has faced during the past 12 months".

As chief finance officer Dick Linford sadly informed Wapping's galley-slaves: "Overall operating profit declined slightly during the year, increased costs have been incurred from enhancing our products and there has been significant loss of revenue..."

This may seem curious to readers of the News Corporation annual report and accounts, just published, which clearly state that sales revenue for newspapers in the group increased by 9.6 percent. In the UK operation, sales revenue increased by 15.3 percent, operating income increased by 2.5 percent, while capital expenditure went *down* by 39.2 percent.

Now come the really interesting figures. News Corporation's retained profits for the year ended 30 June 1999 show a rise of 16.7 percent, from 8.3 *billion* Australian dollars to 9.7 billion. At an exchange rate of 2.5 Australian dollars to the pound, this increase works out at £11,000 for every man, woman (and child) of the 50,000 worldwide employees of the company, and follows a 24.3 percent increase in retained profits the previous year. And yet the Digger, in his wisdom, has decreed that staff must take a cut in their taxable annual bonus to £276.

Oddly enough the excuse about financial "pressures" doesn't seem to apply to directors' remuneration for the year, which has risen by a wallet-boggling 81 percent, from US$29,559,000 to US$53,488,000. After the many stories written by News International hacks about "fat cat" directors in recent years, the words pot and kettle come to mind.

No doubt the revelation of these figures will make for some lively discussion at the next meeting of the newly formed News International Staff Association when the question of millennium payments comes up. At the moment Wapping executives are offering a princely £200 for hacks who work on 1 January 2000 – plus a free raffle ticket for prizes including a new car and a Caribbean holiday.

THE *Independent* has launched a brave crusade against the fashion industry's use of foreign sweatshops that exploit cheap labour.

In a front page story on 27 September it revealed that half the clothes sold in high street stores came from developing countries where wages are low and conditions are poor. The worst offender was The Gap, closely followed in the list of shame by Top Shop and Morgan.

Alas! Only two days earlier the *Indie*'s Saturday supplement had carried another list – of the "50 best buys for winter". One recommended item was a fisherman's hat from... The Gap. ("This taupe wool fisherman's hat will get you stroked a lot due to its luxurious fluffiness.") Also in the list of desirables were Top Shop and Morgan.

The *Indie*'s campaign came a week after its highly lucrative fashion special for London Fashion Week, which was packed out with ads for most leading clothes companies. Meanwhile, well-known fashion nutter Janet Street-Porter is cramming so much fashion into the *Sindie* that she even put bog-standard Italian designer Enrico Coveri on her front page for no other reason than that it was the start of Italian fashion week.

OH, YEAH?

Margaret Thatcher describes William Hague as one of the best leaders in opposition any party has had, a "gifted strategist and a brilliant debater" with the single most important quality in a politician: courage.

– Daily Telegraph, 4 October

THE stakes are high as the *Times* desperately prepares its defence against the libel action brought by Tory party treasurer Michael Ashcroft.

Editor Peter Stothard is petrified because Ashcroft is prepared to spend millions to win the case. The prospects of a settlement are zero unless Murdoch capitulates. So the *Times* has hired a firm of private investigators to prop up its case as libel cases now reach the courts far quicker.

Meanwhile, Ashcroft is using Lord Bell's PR/lobbying company Bell-Pottinger to coordinate his attack. Bell has worked for Ashcroft for the past 10 years and was originally introduced by Lord Parkinson.

But an embarrassing hitch has arisen for Bell and Ashcroft: for the past 10 years Bell has also been on the payroll of a certain multinational newspaper corporation. It is, of course, News International, publisher of the *Times*. Given Bell's past record of dealing with conflicts of interest (working for the BBC and British Airways when *Newsnight* was reporting the BA's dirty tricks controversy; and working for the BBC and BskyB at the same time), he will no doubt overcome this delicate problem.

WHICH *Times* political commentator – if any – should one trust? It's a toss up.

Commenting on Labour's reaction to Tony Blair's rabble-rousing conference speech, Alice Miles wrote that it "was met with slightly bemused applause which, in the circumstances, was little more than polite".

On the same day and the same page in the very next column, meanwhile, Simon Jenkins saw things very differently: "Mr Blair was yesterday cheered to the echo. This was a phenomenon."

Probably best for *Times* readers to listen to the speech themselves and then make up their own minds.

"It's outrageous – Mandelson got let off after 10 months"

MICHAEL PORTILLO may be taking his soul-searching and breast-beating a little too far. In a column for the *Scotsman* two weeks ago he claimed that Tory policy under Ted Heath's government was little better than socialism.

"My own grammar school," he noted by way of example, "was abolished under plans drawn up by a Conservative council and signed off by Margaret Thatcher as education secretary."

Not so. It was in fact a Labour-controlled Harrow borough council that submitted proposals to Heath's government to reform its secondary and grammar schools. Margaret Thatcher, as education secretary, approved the plans – but with the specific exception that Harrow County boys' school (Portillo's alma mater) and Heriots Wood girls' school should be retained as grammar schools.

When Harold Wilson returned to power the proposals were resubmitted – and approved by a Labour education secretary, Reg Prentice.

In the opening sentence of his column, Portillo wrote that "it is surprising how even an adroit politician like Mr Blair can impale himself on a hook of his own making." Er, quite.

JUST FANCY THAT!

Routledge: About your moral purpose Vicar — who are you to tell us how to live our lives?

Blair: I'm not a vicar Paul...

The Mirror

HOWEVER much she might try to help, there is only so much the *Sun*'s "Dear" Deirdre can achieve through the limiting medium of photostories involving young women not wearing many clothes. So last week the paper launched "A New Sun Service That Could Change Your Life", in the form of the Relate LiveLine.

The service – in partnership with professional counselling organisation Relate – is a premium rate phone line, and potential callers are clearly warned that calls cost £1 a minute. What they are not told, however, is that only 20p of that pound goes to the trained counsellor on the end of the line – and that the bulk of the remaining cash is pocketed by the new caring, sharing *Sun*.

SPOOKS & SPOOKMEN

WHAT exactly is the status of the much-hyped "Mitrokhin Archive", now in the possession of British security and intelligence?

If Whitehall has classified the papers as top secret, then MI6 and Malcolm Rifkind had no business handing them over to Professor Christopher Andrew. But if they are unclassified, then why haven't they been placed in the House of Commons library and elsewhere?

The Labour MP Andrew Mackinlay has written to home secretary Jack Straw expressing his bewilderment that "it is apparently satisfactory for an academic to have access to these documents but not MPs". But Straw's reply does nothing to ease the bewilderment. "Obviously, this material carried no British protective marking," he admits. "It was nonetheless of great sensitivity, and it was important to ensure that nothing was published which could put at risk the current protection of our security." Handing it over to Christopher Andrew was, according to Straw, "the best way to place it in the public domain".

So are the papers secret or not? That information is, er, classified.

FOLLOWING the BBC's shabby treatment of Penny Harrison, who had to sue in the South African courts for proper compensation for the loss of her husband, John Harrison, who was killed in Bophutatswana, BBC News bosses have been quietly employing the services of ex-military "minders" for their roving reporters.

This is a wheeze dreamed up by the insurance companies, the idea being to outmanoeuvre any future widows or widowers who might try to emulate Mrs Harrison's successful technique by showing that every precaution had not been taken for the employee's safety.

The most recent beneficiary of the £1,000-a-day service was plucky, bullet-dodging Kate Adie, during her eventful trip to Kosovo. But the only occasion when his military skills were called for was a ferocious and almost physical dispute between Adie and her former BBC colleague Keith Graves, who is now one of Rupert Murdoch's growing stable of ex-BBC and ITN hacks. Although Graves, who was somewhat larger than the minder, advised him in his customary pithy language to be on his way, the two men soon became the best of pals.

CORRECTION

FOLLOWING our recent report into the death of Sarah Thomas in police custody (Same Old Story, *Eye* 984) the Police Complaints Authority has pointed out that Judge Gerald Butler, in his recent inquiry into deaths in police custody, did not criticise the PCA.

His report was only concerned with the Crown Prosecution Service.

Walking With Dinosaur Tie-Ins...

ROYAL NEWS

THE Queen's private secretary Sir Robin Janvrin has ordered a review of all staff and others allowed routine entry to Buckingham Palace following the theft of personal items from Princess Anne's office.

Although press reports have assumed that the items, including a tie-pin, photographs and some pens, disappeared at the same time, the truth is no one can be certain. Princess Anne is often away from her office for long periods and intermittent visits from an in-house thief haven't been ruled out.

This is the latest in a series of petty thefts from Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle. Office workers up and down the land help themselves to free stationery while royal workers supply the memorabilia markets, particularly in America. A blind eye has been turned to such goings-on until now. No full-time staff member has been subjected to the routine search on leaving the premises allowed for in staff contracts.

Her Majness is notoriously frugal in what she pays staff below the top tier, which has led to some having to make a few bob leaking stories to the press – such as the underpaid mole who broke the blackout on the Princess Anne story ordered by Simon Lewis, Brenda's unpopular Blairite spin doctor.

Others, such as the army of casual waiters who wear scarlet and gold at state banquets in return for the minimum wage of £3.60 per hour, do what they can by purloining gilt buttons, crested forks and silk menu cards. Some have been caught and removed from the list of casual staff and refused references, but Inspector Knacker has not been called in.

Brenda herself has not been immune from illegal activity. At least one pair of engraved gold cufflinks, usually presented by her to departing senior staff, appears to have grown legs and walked, as well as several less glamorous items.

Calling in Knacker to deal with the latest incident will no doubt prompt the thieves to lay off for a while. The review of the 850 or so people with ready access to the palace will take time, involving a new criminal records check, but when completed it should produce a few red faces around the palace.

HACKWATCH

Loonybins Agonistes

WHAT is the most heart-rending love story of the millennium? Abelard and Heloise? Romeo and Juliet? Or could it be the doomed romance between Tony Blair and Paul "Loonybins" Johnson? As with all such dramas, the denouement was, er, tragically inevitable...

3 October 1994: "Blair already gives the impression that he is a product of a political Disneyland," Paul Johnson opines. "Not only is he a bit too good to be true, one also has an uneasy feeling that he is not quite real and that, when the day is over, he is covered with a dust-sheet and hung in a cupboard."

29 March 1995: In the London *Evening Standard*, Paul explains "why I believe in Tony Blair". The Labour leader "goes to church, says his prayers, and thinks deeply about politics in religious terms. He is also quite determined, as prime minister, to be guided by moral principle".

17 April 1997: Johnson makes a startling disclosure about his new friend Tony. "He has never been a Europhile," he writes in the *Mail*. When Blair becomes PM, he will "renegotiate Britain's entire role in Europe", possibly even withdrawing altogether.

2 May 1997: To celebrate Tony's landslide, Paul describes their first meeting. "When Blair became Labour leader, I wrote to him and said 'I have known all your predecessors from Attlee on. But I've never met you. Why not come to lunch at my house?' The next thing I knew he was on the doorstep." Since then, the affair has blossomed. "We sometimes dine together as a family in the evening," he adds. "He makes me feel very paternal and protective."

13 July 1997: Johnson reports that before the big pro-hunting rally in London "I myself begged Tony Blair to make an appearance". But the PM ignored his plea. "If Blair is wise, and I think he is, he will listen."

6 August 1997: Asked by an interviewer from the *Evening Standard* how often he visits Blair in Downing Street, Johnson modestly replies: "Well, that's confidential. I see him whenever he asks me... I don't think I have ever come across in politics someone I like and trust more."

19 September 1997: Whoops! In a polemic for the *Mail*, Johnson blames the woes of modern Britain on the Major government's changes to the divorce law. "I begged Tony Blair to kill this destructive Bill, which he certainly could have done, but he refused... He still does not grasp the centrality of the issue. It is monstrous..."

5 November 1997: In the *Daily Telegraph*, Johnson delivers a verdict on Blair's record so far: "Since taking office, he has not put a foot wrong."

15 March 1998: Paul grants an audience to an interviewer from the *New York Times*. When Thatcher was first elected, he recalls, she was "very ignorant in many ways", so he took it upon himself to educate her and "by the time she left office, she knew everything". Now he's doing the same with Blair. "I help him with his speeches, you see," he says, pointing proudly to a letter from Tony on his study wall: "Dear Paul, You're quite simply one of the most remarkable people in our country..."

6 April 1998: Dear Paul returns the compliment. "Blair has failed to stamp out sleaze... The government is spin-doctoring itself out of control... It plays straight into the hands of those who have always claimed that Blair himself is merely a clever showman without substance. 'We told you so,' they chortle." Unable to bear being chortled at, Paul begs the PM to pull his socks up.

17 April 1998: Paul is swiftly back on message. "I love Blair," he announces at a round-table discussion organised by the *Daily Telegraph*. "His record of political mastery is stupendous." When the other panellists remain sceptical, Johnson produces the clinching proof: "He came to my birthday party last November."

25 April 1998: Johnson is sickened by Cool Britannia. "I am increasingly uneasy at the uncanny echoes of Sixties fatuity which are detectable in Tony Blair's Nineties," he warns. The only hope is for Paul himself "to speak out loud and clear and tell Tony Blair and anyone in power who will listen: 'For God's sake, don't go back to the silly Sixties!'"

30 April 1998: "I like and admire Blair, and my regard and admiration has increased during the past year," Johnson drools. "When Blair took over No 10, I said: 'Promise me you will say a prayer each day not to be corrupted by power,' and he said he would. I believe he has kept that promise." And, of course, he has continued to attend Paul's tutorials. "He is a keen, quick student, just like Margaret Thatcher before him. A year ago there were some areas where I knew more than he did. Now I can hardly think of one."

27 July 1998: "Where is the style, panache and stunning professionalism which marked New Labour's early days?" Johnson asks despairingly. "When he was a boy, George III's mother used to say to him: 'George, be a King!' I say to Blair: 'Tony, be a Prime Minister! And get cracking today.'"

10 September 1998: Yet another tiff. "Long before Tony Blair took office, I warned him to have as little as possible to do with constitutional reform in any shape." Yet Blair has seen fit to ignore this advice by deciding to get rid of hereditary peers — thus proving his "personal weakness and lack of leadership".

30 September 1998: Paul sends an ecstatic despatch from the Labour conference. "For his big speech, Tony Blair spoke against a background of royal purple... And the speech was indeed august, king-like, sovereign and monarchical... Blair has given us his message, and it is good."

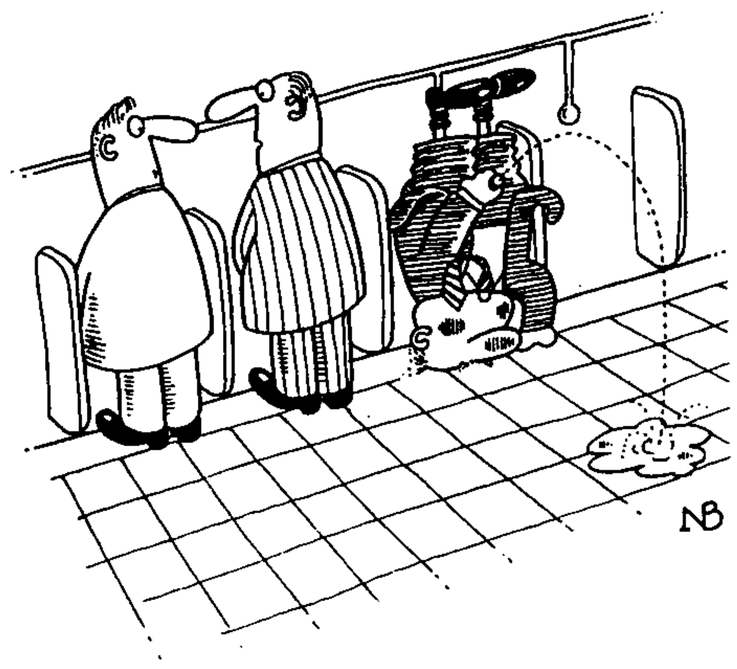
19 November 1998: Johnson is furious that Geoffrey Robinson hasn't yet been sacked from the government. "What is wrong with Tony Blair?" he rages. "I am beginning to think that Blair has one outstanding weakness... He loves to be liked."

24 February 1999: *Mail* readers who believed Johnson's confident assertions that Blair was a committed Eurosceptic must be puzzled by the PM's apparent support for the single currency. Paul is incandescent. "The smiling, polite, engaging, charming Tony is one of the most duplicitous politicians ever to deceive the British people, a Machiavellian monster whose entire public life is devoted to deception." But wait: perhaps Blair himself is a dupe. "That is my interpretation," Paul decides eventually. "He is not so much deceiving the public. He is, unconsciously perhaps but foolishly and recklessly, deceiving himself."

28 April 1999: Time to kiss and make up. "Wars bring out the truth in a politician," Paul observes. And the Kosovo war confirms that Tony Blair has "the soul, the instincts, the valour and — yes — the ferocity of a hawk... Blair walks in the footsteps not only of Margaret Thatcher but also of Winston Churchill... Blair has found himself, whether he likes it or not, the real leader of the Western world." Is he big enough to carry this burden of leadership? "My belief is he can."

25 September 1999: Or not, as the case may be. "Has all power slipped into Blair's hands? That's not the impression I get. He often appears bewildered by what is going on." But even if some voters are disillusioned by Blair, "many still like him — I do".

29 September 1999: The end of the affair. "Yesterday at Bournemouth was a sad day for Britain," Johnson sobs. "Like a large number of other people, I believed Tony Blair was something special..." Now, after hearing the leader's speech, he realises that his protégé is "spiteful", "third-rate", "hypocritical" and "downright contemptible". As he concludes, "I shake my head sadly in disbelief." And, throughout Britain, *Daily Mail* readers weep too — with helpless, hysterical laughter.



"Don't worry – it's only Paul Johnson"

EYE TV

Something For The Weekend; Eurotrash; Naked Elvis (all C4)

VERY little should be read into the universal critical derision which has greeted Something For The Weekend.

This Denise van Outen vehicle, which recently occupied Channel 4's prestigious Just Managed To Crawl In After Drinking Fifteen Pints Of Lager slot on Friday evening, received the full adjectival assault from most right-thinking reviewers, as everyone must have known it would.

Banal, mindless, infantile, pandering to the lowest common denominator — *Something For The Weekend* is all of these things and proud of it. It laughs in the face of critical disapprobation, and waves its willy at good taste. (Or to use its own preferred word, todger.) It is wantonly, aggressively lowbrow. Nothing the critics can say will affect it in any way at all.

The defence, of course, is irony. Like its equally crass precursors *The Word* and *The Girlie Show, Something For The Weekend* comes with a factory-applied smirk that allows it far greater leeway than more straightforward light entertainment formats. These aren't genuine sincere penises, producers of genuine urine and sincere spermatazoa. They are todgers, the ultimate comedy accessory. Sometimes we see them, sometimes we don't, but we always know they are there.

Again, not all the games involve todgers, but we are always aware that the non-todger games are there to fill the gaps between the all-important todger games. Even on a show as fatuous as this, it's important to maintain a balance. (As yet none of the todgers have done any todging. Presumably they are saving this up for series two.)

What's most annoying, and what even the angriest critic may eventually have to acknowledge, is that for what it is, *Something For The Weekend* is unusually well done. Kept down to a manageable half hour, it is well paced, looks fantastic and never bites off more than it can chew (cue gales of audience laughter).

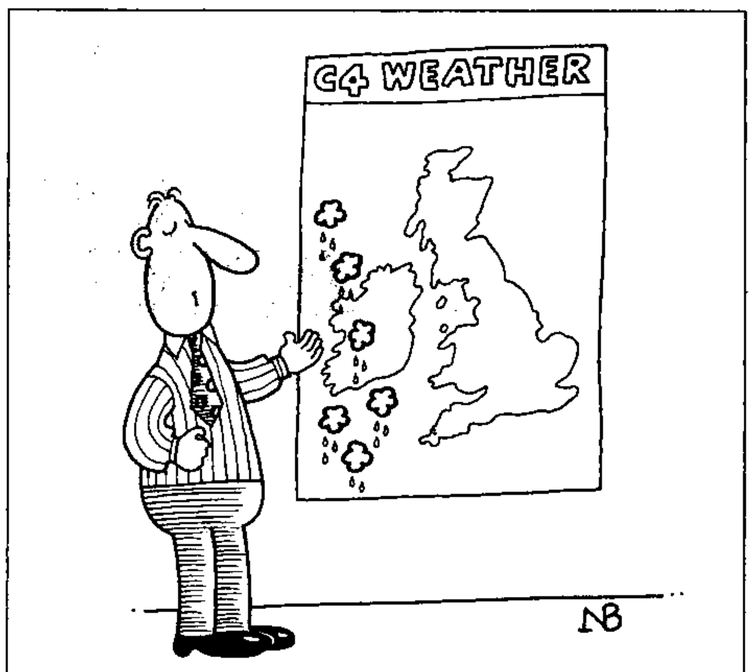
Best of all, surprisingly, is van Outen. It takes a peculiar fearlessness to drive a show like this, allied to a quick brain and an instinctive vulgarity. Van Outen has all three, and is now clearly set up for a long and glorious Cilla-like TV career, although let's hope it's not with this show. Yet again we confront the great structural weakness of the British TV industry: talent, time and money wasted on rubbish for morons.

The great structural weakness of these formats, fortunately, is their limited shelf life. Immediately preceding *SFTW*, for instance, is **Eurotrash**, which has been sniggering at sad Danish pornographers and fat German coprophiliacs for so long that all shock value has long since disappeared. Irony, again, was the mechanism and the excuse, a way for viewers to laugh at funny foreigners while nonetheless tuning in every week to see what they got up to, and where, and with what amusingly shaped vegetable. And yet ennui has now set in.

Antoine de Caunes, clearly bored to death with the whole thing, insults his audience more blatantly than ever while the secondary characters — the man who dresses up as a penguin, the bewigged lounge singer called Wally, the woman with breasts so large she can barely stand up — have been promoted as cult figures, despite (or perhaps because of) their obvious imbecility. Now in its 12th series, **Eurotrash** is a show begging to be put out of its misery.

But the lesson of this sort of programming is that there's always worse to come. Connoisseurs of the trash aesthetic are now raving about *Naked Elvis*, a no-budget pop trivia quiz currently running in the middle of the night which always seems to end with an Elvis impersonator whipping off his y-fronts. The show is indeed awesomely inept, criminally tedious and intolerably pleased with itself, and makes *Something For The Weekend* look like *Panorama*. Michael Jackson should be forced to watch the whole series in one go with his eyelids taped open and his screams ignored by attendant medical staff. Now that would be ironic…

'Couch Potato'



"There's a fuck of a lot of cloud out to the west, so later it's going to piss it down"

Focus on leaks

PLAGIARISM is supposed to be discouraged in journalism and the academic world, but for years now the BBC has tolerated – in fact has actually craved – one form of text-theft.

The best material in any factual programme is handed over to a newspaper in advance of transmission. That fascinating interview in the *Guardian* with the law-and-order freak whose son killed his mother? A grudging italic line at the end admits that ITV did all the leg-work.

That harrowing piece in the *Mail* about the rare genetic disorder which has orphaned successive generations of one family? The BBC paid for all the research and then gave it away for nothing.

This system has managed to disfigure both print and television journalism. Not only does a majority of all newspaper feature-writing feel cheatingly secondhand, but the newspaper-reading viewer who sits down in front of a documentary has the irritating feeling of an original transmission feeling like a repeat.

Even so, the arrangement was seen to benefit both publishers and producers. Newspapers have been able to scale down their research and investigative teams while television companies got promotional puffs for their programmes far larger than those available on the preview pages and without the risk of critical squibbling.

This cosy exchange of information is, however, finally being questioned because of the experience of the BBC2 series *The Spying Game*. This was supposed to be one of the channel's big autumn programmes. When a BBC exec referred at a press beano to a series so sensitive and secret that its subject could not even be revealed, this was the show he meant.

As the *Eye* has explained, the supposedly controlled leak of the contents to a newspaper went badly wrong; but even so the producers consoled themselves that front page headlines resulting from the exposure of more communist moles in Britain could only be good for the programme's profile. In fact the series has gone out scarcely watched and largely ignored by critics. Viewers feel it is a series they have already had.

'Square Eyes'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

John Lennon Gallagher

Plugged In

"Hey, hey, hey, kids! And mums and dads. And even grandparents…

It's Krusty the Clown welcoming every Simpsons watcher to this very special edition of the Springfield Gazette!"

Start of an eight-page pullout in the *Sun* (prop: R. Murdoch) about the *Simpsons*, made by Fox (prop: R. Murdoch) and shown on Sky One (prop: R. Murdoch).

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

NOOKS and CORNERS

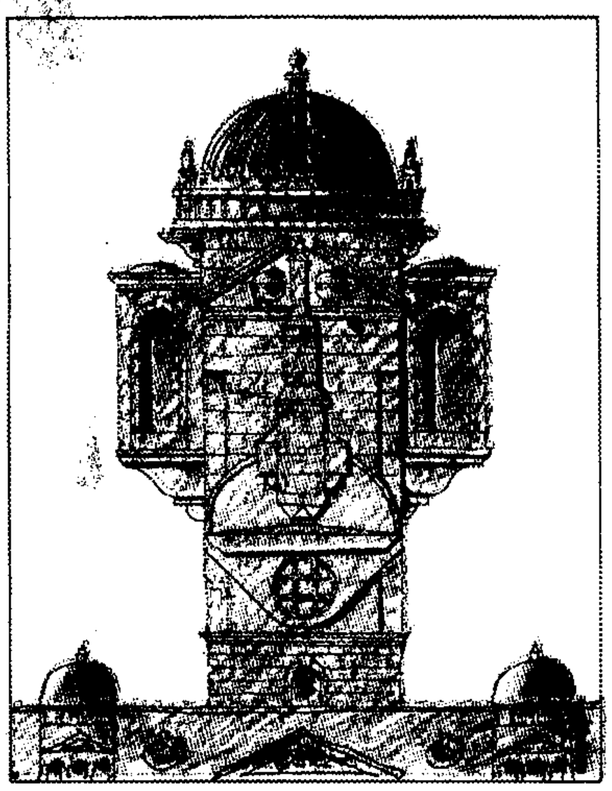
THANKS to the accompanying cartoon by Louis Hellman, I am spared the painful duty of illustrating another example of the sort of architecture that the Prince of Wales likes. Indeed, if all goes badly, it may well become his principal architectural legacy now that the Institute of Architecture he founded (and which once had so much to offer) slowly sinks giggling and sobbing beneath the waves, under yet another incompetent captain, owing to His Royal Highness's complete inability to continue with a course of action and not to change his mind every five minutes.

So what does the Prince of Wales like? The proposed Oxford Centre of Islamic Studies backed by Saudi money, supported by the prince and designed by one of his favourite architects, Professor Abdel Wahed El-Wakil, HFAIA, from Egypt, "assisted by" the Areen Design Group of London.

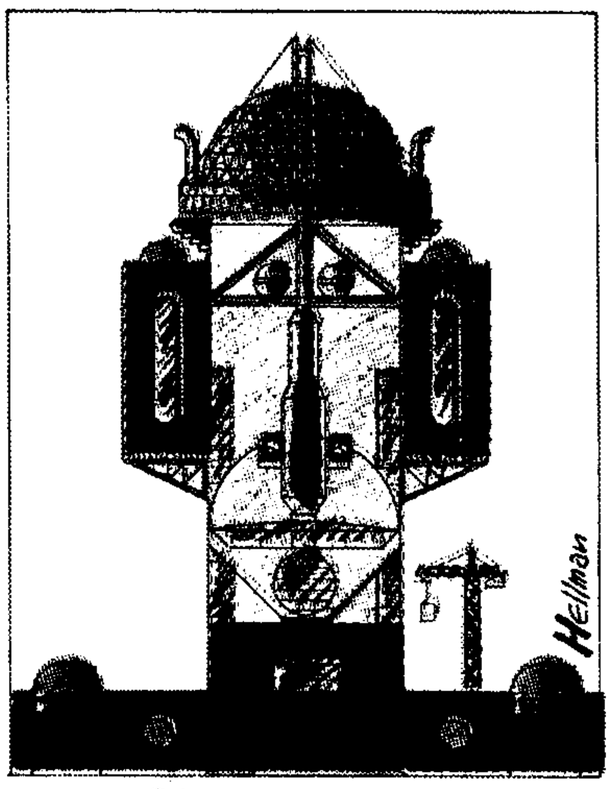
This new building was first proposed for a site on the edge of the Magdalen College Deer Park and thus provoked opposition, not least from Merton College. It is now intended for a site in Marston Road and King's Mill Lane currently owned and used by Magdalen College as a sports field and within a conservation area. The thing would be much less conspicuous here; English Heritage considers that it would not affect the setting of the grade I registered gardens of Magdalen; and Oxford city council is minded to grant planning permission.

The Garden History Society thinks otherwise, arguing that Magdalen College is "among the very greatest parks and gardens in the country" and that, if built, the Oxford Centre of Islamic Studies would be clearly visible from the Fellows' Garden and not be an improvement. The society points out that government circular PPG 15 states that "local planning authorities should protect registered parks and gardens in preparing development plans and in determining planning applications" and it insists that "the presence of a substantial building — irrespective of its architectural merits — clearly visible from and close to the far side of the Fellows Garden would be seriously harmful to the character and appearance of the Grade I registered landscape" even if Magdalen College couldn't much care.

"Irrespective of its architectural merits." How wise the Garden History Society is not to comment on the architecture. To judge by the drawings, Mr El-Wakil's creation is a trifle eclectic, not to say undigested. A sort of neo-Georgian range with Scottish crow-stepped gables is placed next to one in the Pisan Romanesque so favoured by Ruskin, while the skyline is enlivened with Gothic pinnacles, a Classical cupola, a large and vaguely orientalised Florentine dome and an absolutely whopping minaret in an Islamic-Hawksmoor style which promises to compete with the Dreaming Spires and become Oxford's principal vertical feature.



THE CONVERSION OF...



...PRINCE CHARLES

Oh dear oh dear oh dear: it is all so sensitive. Nobody likes to criticise something so culturally diverse for fear of offending ethnic minorities, alternative faiths, being politically incorrect, etc. Besides, Oxford University can no longer claim to have any sense of what good modern architecture in the city might be. Like Cambridge, the place is a modish architectural zoo and, besides, Magdalen College has itself built an example of scissors 'n' paste Prince of Wales traditionalism in the shape of the new building in Longwall Street by Demitri Porphyrios, where bits of Greek Revival are sellotaped to elevations in inept, misunderstood Tudor. It is all so witty, so ironical, so painful: come back Jim Stirling, all is forgiven.

Apart from the posturing by Oxford luminaries who ought to know better, what is perhaps saddest about this is the evidence of a complete collapse of any coherent notion of what a modern traditional Islamic architecture might be. No doubt this loss of creative confidence is all the fault of the nefarious "orientalist" policies of the west, whose own "Modern Movement" ended up by littering the sandy deserts of the Middle East with monstrous, expensive concrete and glass buildings at the behest of various local royal families, princes and emirs. But if traditional eastern architecture has lost its way, and proved incapable of development and abstraction, then at least Mr El-Wakil might have given Oxford a modest essay in well-crafted Islamic rather than this disgracefully incoherent and arrogant dog's dinner of historical elements. The Prince of Wales has much to answer for.

I AM very sorry to hear that historic Dollis Hill House is under threat. No, I am not making this up. It is, or was the most interesting building in Neasden until the amazing new (and completely unimaginative) Hindu Temple was built.

A "modest Regency house" as the Buildings of England volume describes it, Dollis Hill House was built in 1825 and stands in Gladstone Park, so named because it was for a time a favourite retreat of the great Victorian Liberal prime minister. Now, alas, it is owned by the London borough of Brent, which has allowed it to be the victim of two arson attacks in the last five years.

The grade II listed house is now a scaffolded wreck with a temporary roof, while Brent council wrings its hands and claims it cannot afford to do anything more even though local people would like to see the house rescued and run as a museum. It all sounds horribly like the story of Danson Park in Bexley, another elegant but wickedly neglected and vandalised mansion in a public park owned by another horrible council — if of a different political persuasion — at the opposite corner of Greater London.

Well, thanks to English Heritage, the Georgian Group and others, Danson Park has now been rescued and restored with public money. Dollis Hill House is too precious to lose, and the same could happen there — if there is the will. Wake up Neasden!

'Piloti'

MEDIA NEWS

ONE of the only decent stories at the Labour party conference this year was John Prescott's decision to use a car to travel 250 yards to deliver a keynote speech on how we should all use our cars less.

It made most of the front pages the following day. And it was heavily featured on breakfast television in GMTV's conference coverage – despite the best efforts of one producer at the station who, though not on duty that day, went to the effort of contacting chief political correspondent Sarah Holden, both by mobile and in person, to convince her the story really wasn't worth covering.

His name? Er, David Prescott, 29-year-old son of the deputy prime minister and the man chosen in August to grill fearlessly his dad about the rail regulator's threat to fine Railtrack £40m. And what was the response from Prescott's superiors to his intervention? He was told he faced a simple career choice: either continue as a journalist with the station or function as a spindoctor elsewhere.

BBC Resources, the limited company that handles production assets at the Beeb, is in the process of "securing its future" – by sacking production staff BBC World-style.

It is to close down its entire film unit – once a key part of the public service broadcaster and the winner of many awards over the years – "because of its failure to become profitable". Fifty jobs will go.

This is the biggest sign yet that Resources is not working well as a limited company. Designed to compete for business with freelance crews outside the BBC, it still has to pay for the huge overheads piled up by its vast troupe of expensive managers. Their new demands for "profit" are the last straw.

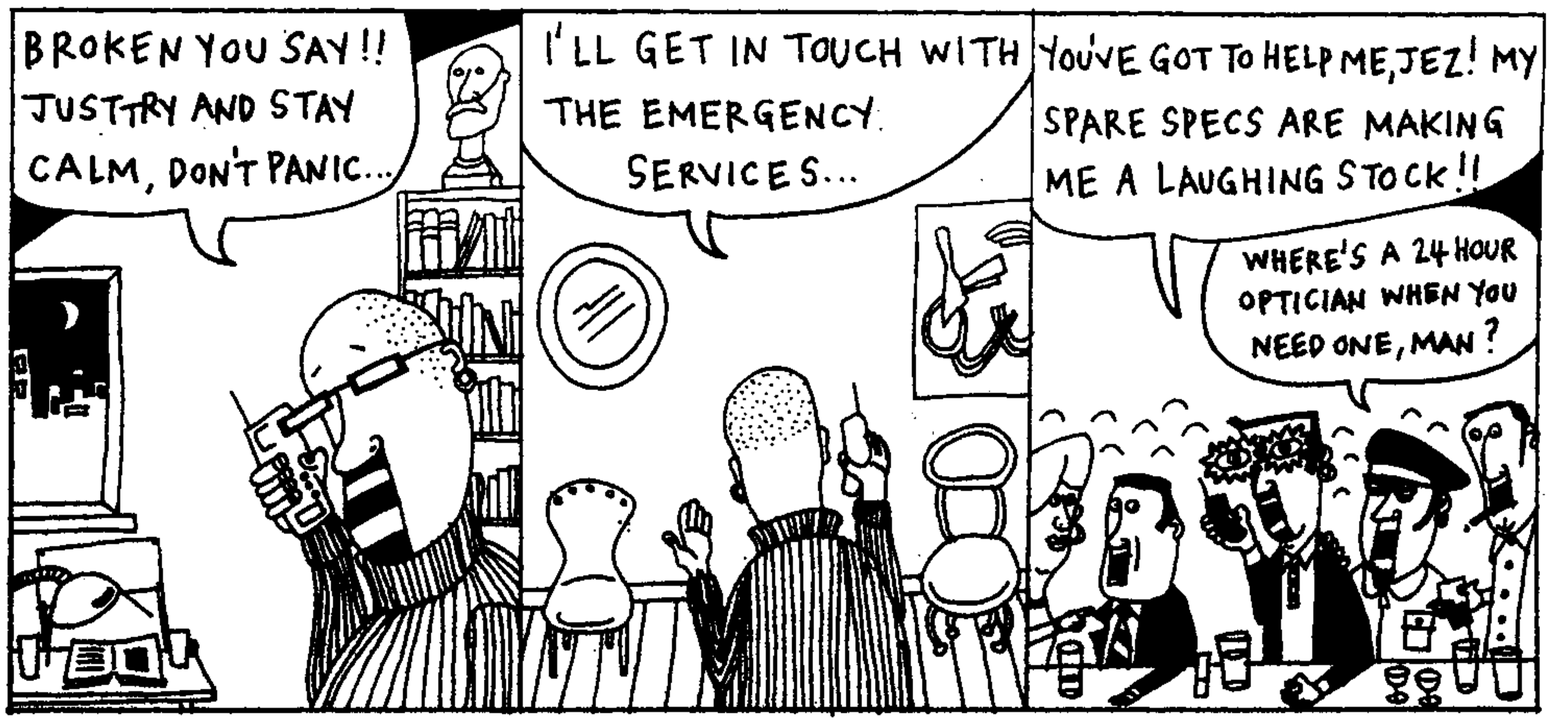
This is bad news for the rest of Resources. Managers have signalled that they're no longer going to subsidise activities that don't bring the readies flooding in… and according to its absurd accounting system, the whole of Resources itself is already £10m in the red.

FANS' complaints about the myriad of digital, satellite and terrestrial channels screening British clubs' European encounters this season reached fever pitch in Yorkshire on the night of Leeds United's UEFA cup clash with Partizan Belgrade.

The game was available only on Sky Sports News, a previously unheard-of channel available by paying extra for the Sky Digital package. But those fans who had forked out for the privilege – and thousands who packed into pubs which had also paid extra – were as sick as the proverbial when pictures from Elland Road were lost minutes before kick-off.

Callers jamming BskyB's switchboard were told a "technical fault" had blanked out the game. All a bit embarrassing for Rupert Murdoch and Leeds United – as the debacle coincided with the Dirty Digger's BskyB taking a 9 percent stake in the high-flying club. As part of the deal, BSkyB is to advise Leeds United on how successfully to market its matches on, er, television.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


BROKEN YOU SAY!! JUST TRY AND STAY CALM, DON'T PANIC...
I'LL GET IN TOUCH WITH THE EMERGENCY SERVICES...
YOU'VE GOT TO HELP ME, JEZ! MY SPARE SPECS ARE MAKING ME A LAUGHING STOCK!!
WHERE'S A 24 HOUR OPTICIAN WHEN YOU NEED ONE, MAN?

DOING THE ROUNDS

Spinal cord injuries

IN JUNE 1995 Simon Horsfall had an accident at work which broke his back and left him paralysed from the mid-chest down. Today he describes himself as "cheap as a paraplegic": he lives independently and on his own, and has arranged and financed his own accommodation.

Mr Horsfall receives £12,000 a year in various benefits, no longer pays tax or National Insurance on the £30,000 salary he used to earn and pays a reduced council tax bill; and spent spent three and a half months in a spinal injuries unit (SIU). Including £3,000 a year in free prescriptions, a wheelchair and outpatient care, he estimates that overall he costs the state £25,000 a year, compared to a tetraplegic patient who might cost £80,000 a year for round the clock care.

Mr Horsfall calculates that the 40,000 to 50,000 patients with spinal cord injury (SCI) in the UK cost more than £1bn a year. Keen to use this as an argument to fund research into the improved early treatment of SCI, Mr Horsfall sent a proposal via his MP to the then health minister Paul Boateng, who replied that the department of health "would not itself be able to undertake such a report".

In fact the DoH doesn't even know the incidence of SCI. As public health minister Tessa Jowell told the Commons in July 1998: "Information on the incidence of spinal cord injury is not held centrally. However, estimates based upon the number of hospital admissions suggest that there are about 400 new cases of spinal cord injury in England each year."

Mr Horsfall also asked ministers why patients with spinal chord injury in the UK are not routinely given the drug Methylprednisolone (MP). Extensive trials in the United States by the National Acute Spinal Cord Injury Survey (NASCIS) show that if administered within eight hours of trauma, paralysis can be reduced by 22 to 57 percent.

It works in some patients by preserving the undamaged parts of the spinal cord after the trauma and suppressing further damage. It has been routinely administered by paramedics as a mainstream treatment for around 10 years in the US. It is also used in Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France and Portugal. Why not here?

In a letter dated 21 July 1998, Paul Boateng clearly believed it should be used: "...this drug is now recommended by professional bodies to doctors in UK hospital Accident and Emergency Departments as part of the standard clinical treatment of acute spinal cord injury, and is included as part of the current Advanced Trauma and Life Support training for such doctors." This view was reinforced by health minister John Hutton in a letter in November 1998: "As stated in Paul Boateng's letter of 21 August the administration of the drug Methylprednisolone (MP) is recommended practice within A&E Units."

"Right, Mr Johnson – now say AHHHHH"

However, by 11 June this year, Mr Hutton appears to have changed his mind. "Because methylprednisolone can have serious side effects, including bone loss and stomach ulceration, a consensus view will not emerge among British clinicians until further analysis has been completed, a process that is currently taking place."

All steroids have side effects but the risk is far less if the doses are given over a short period. In the NASCIS trial, the benefits were clearly thought to outweigh the risks, and as Professor Wise Young, a leading researcher into SCI at New York University, puts it: "Seven years on from the original papers following the trials, British specialists are still picking holes in the data and squabbling over the results."

As elsewhere in the NHS, the treatment you get depends where you end up and how quickly you get there. The Spinal Injuries' Association charter states that once SCI is confirmed or suspected, the attending physician "should be obliged" to contact their regional spinal injuries unit and, if necessary, secure immediate transfer.

Alas, the last survey on arrival times found that very few patients make it within the eight-hour window for giving methylprednisolone — if the specialist believes in it. Given the huge costs of spinal cord injury and the potential benefits of MP treatment, perhaps the government's National Institute of Clinical Excellence could give Mr Horsfall a fast-track decision. It'll be just four years, three months and eight hours too late for him, but it could make a huge difference to the two people a day who suffer similar horrific injuries.

M.D.

Down on the Fish Farm

THE amnesic shellfish poison (ASP) outbreak (Eye 981), which has closed 9,000 square miles of Scottish seas to scallop fishing, is now in its third month.

Government scientists have no idea when the ban might be lifted and claim ASP is "naturally occurring". They insist it is not "triggered" by untreated nitrogenous fish farm filth entering Scotland's pristine coastal waters.

John Davies, deputy director at the government's marine laboratory in Aberdeen, suggests a rise in seawater temperature could have caused the outbreak. He says it has risen 4oC in the past six years. His colleague, Ian Davies, who is charged with examining the environmental impact of fish farming, claims these farms discharge only 7 percent of all nitrogen entering Scottish sea lochs. Therefore, he says, they can't be implicated. But no field research has been carried out.

What Ian Davies does not say is that in summer months, when farm salmon are most intensively fed, nitrogenous levels of fish farm ammonium entering sea lochs is probably in excess of 70 percent, rather than his conveniently "averaged" figure of 7 percent. And studies in France and Chile into the effect of animal wastes on phytoplankton show that a paralytic shellfish poison (PSP) dinoflagellate was stimulated by salmon farm waste ammonium. The Messrs Davies, known affectionately to their friends as the "Taffy Mafia" of Tartan fish farming, might soon have some explaining to do.

In the meantime the boys from the valleys are getting on with what they do best: protecting their dirty baby, factory-salmon farming, from public scrutiny. This is becoming increasingly difficult, particularly following the Belgian food scandal when unacceptably high levels of life-threatening dioxins were found in animal feed, which almost certainly entered the human food chain.

It is alleged that Scottish fishery scientists have known since 1995 that farm fish contained high levels of dioxins, from dioxin-contaminated fishmeal fed to them, and that the most prominent contaminant was DDT. It seems persistent organic pollutants, known as POPs to the cognoscenti, are always with us, or rather will be until government recognises the risk they pose to human health and do something about them.

But not, apparently, if it upsets the fishery scientist's salmon farming chums. Ian Davies, speaking to a group of aquaculture experts at a conference in Canada in September, and well aware of which side his salmon steak is buttered, said that if EU proposals to reduce permitted dioxin levels in fish feed were implemented "...it could mean the end of salmon farming". He urged delegates to do everything they could to help avert this prospect. Well, he would, wouldn't he?

'Old Trout'

DOWN ON THE FARM

EVERYONE has missed the most important question to emerge from France's rejection of the lifting of the European Union (EU) ban on British beef exports.

Nothing made the initial excitement over the lifting more absurd than the fact that, in the days when Britain was annually exporting £500m-worth of beef overseas, four-fifths of this consisted not of top-quality meat from specialist beef cattle, but of elderly dairy cows, past their useful life as milkers and used for processing into pies and soups.

By far our best customer was France, which before 1996 was taking 600,000 cull cows a year. And of course, because such animals are by definition over 30 months old, it is still illegal to sell them except to be incinerated. Despite all the squeaking from agriculture minister Nick Brown, there was no way most of our beef trade with France could have been resumed anyway since it would still be excluded under the "Over 30 Month Scheme" (OTMS).

But remember why the OTMS was first introduced: it was because almost all cattle affected with BSE are dairy cows over 30 months old. So, in the immediate post-Dorrell hysteria in March 1996, those same SEAC scientists who believed there was a connection between BSE and new-variant CJD also suggested that, to be absolutely on the safe side, no meat from 30-month-plus animals should be sold for human consumption unless it was first deboned.

It was this which, thanks to a combination of supermarket pressure, a panicking Douglas Hogg and an hysterical EU, eventually escalated into the obscene scheme to incinerate more than a million cattle a year at a cost to taxpayers which has now reached £5bn.

But this brings us back to the point everyone seems to have missed about those 600,000 cows a year we used to export to France; more than remained to be eaten in Britain. Since these were precisely the animals in which almost all BSE was concentrated, this means that, through all the years when BSE was at its height, the French were actually eating more beef from elderly British dairy cows than the British themselves.

So why, if there is such a certain link between BSE and nvCJD, is the incidence of nvCJD in France not at least as high as it is in Britain, if not higher? Shouldn't Mr Brown answer this question?

● A TINY example of the kind of idiocy into which this scheme now leads Mr Brown's officials was recently experienced by Wiltshire dairy farmer D.M. Drake.

In accordance with MAFF policy, Mr Drake recently sent two old cows to Frome to be destroyed at the delightfully named Wessex Incineration Co. He was then told the intervention board had refused to pay the compensation due on the animals because their eartag numbers did not match those on their paperwork.

The EU herd number was shown on the eartags as WP153, the number allocated when the cows were born. But the number on the documents was WP0153, because the EU had subsequently insisted all herd numbers should have four digits. Intervention board officials had therefore added a "0". But because Mr Drake had not given the cows new eartags including the "0", the officials therefore deprived him of the £900 he was owed for being forced to see his animals pointlessly destroyed.

No doubt Mr Brown would be proud of the way his officials saved taxpayers nearly £1,000. It may not seem much compared to the £1,000m a year wasted on the OTMS. But every little helps.

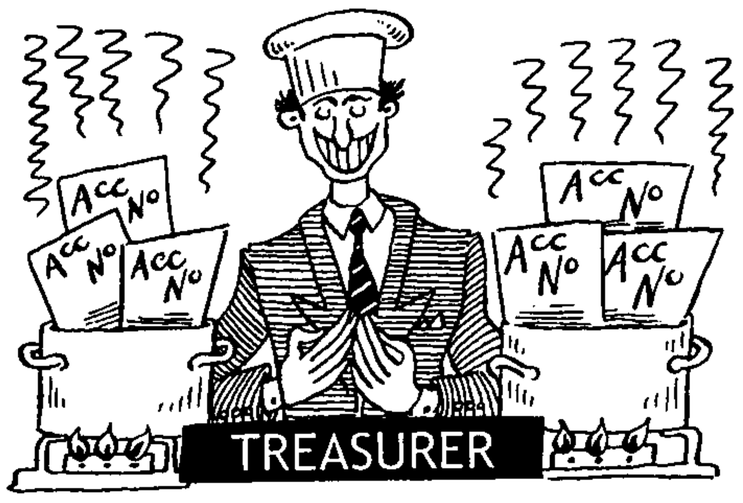
'Even Newer Muckspreader'

£1 Number crunching

Price of a live lamb in crisis-ridden farming industry

£8.99

Price of a leg of lamb in non-crisis-ridden supermarket industry



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

LANCS FOR THE MEMORY

THE CONDUCT of Lancashire county council's deputy leader Frank McKenna (see *Eye* 986) is the subject of damning criticism in a secret auditor's report into the finances of the West Lancashire constituency Labour party.

Skelmersdale councillor McKenna, who acted as election agent for West Lancashire MP Colin Pickthall during the 1997 election, is accused of the deliberate falsification of general election expenses, a "corrupt practice" which can carry a two-year jail sentence.

"It is quite clear that the submission to the local authority was little short of a fabrication, and bore no resemblance to the actual levels of spending," writes constituency auditor Francis Williams, a barrister, in his report to Labour's north-west regional HQ.

"The agent must have known that the return was false... and thus it was a breach not only of electoral law, but also of the Perjury Act 1911." The constituency's spending allowance for the 1997 election was £9,103; McKenna declared expenditure of £5,796.97; the auditor estimates *actual* spending to have been around £15,000.

Financial irregularities catalogued in the auditor's report include:

● Colin Pickthall's 1997 election deposit of £500 being paid in cash the day before the close of nominations by an individual party member — this is thought to be because it could not be guaranteed that the local party's cheque would not bounce;

● The submission of a receipt for £550 supposedly paid by McKenna for the rental of committee rooms from the Ormskirk branch of the Labour party — even though the rooms in question were already in use by the MP with the rent paid by central government, and that the Ormskirk branch has no record of any special rental agreement over the election period;

● An entry in the accounts relating to a payment of £350 to a local printer accompanied by an invoice number: the printer has no knowledge of the payment and the actual invoice number relates to a batch of labels printed for a local farmer (who happens, ironically, to be a staunch Tory);

● The phoney claim of expenditure of £752 on "computer stuff", detailed in *Eye* 986;

● The failure by the then treasurer, county councillor John Fillis, a close associate of McKenna's, to keep proper accounts, compounded by "a deliberate attempt" to hide the truth about election expenses and the state of the local party's finances from worried party members;

● The "highly irregular" conduct of the constituency lottery, with "clear offences" being committed both by Fillis and his successor as treasurer Jane McDermott, a Labour member of West Lancs district council. These included the failure to make regular draws, the failure to submit quarterly returns to the local authority and the failure to regularly publish winners' names.

Cllr McKenna told the *Eye* this week that the allegations in the report were "nonsense... absolute trash". He said: "The general election accounts were in the public domain for two years. I am not aware of any official challenge to them. I have not seen the report by this so-called auditor Williams, but I would be happy to sit down with him and go through it." Last week Colin Pickthall MP told a local newspaper: "Frank McKenna was an outstanding election organiser in the 1992 and 1997 general elections and I am indebted to him for that." Mr Pickthall, who is home secretary Jack Straw's PPS, has ignored five requests for comment from the *Eye*.

● WESTMINSTER council has come in for a lot of stick in this column over the years, so it is a pleasure to be able to applaud a recent council initiative. In May Tory council leader Melvyn Caplan unveiled a new hotline for residents to inform on benefit cheats. It would, he hoped, help "collar more fraudsters in this unrelenting war". Within hours a call came in that led, last month, to a successful prosecution and a three-month jail sentence for a fraudster who had falsely claimed £9,449 in housing benefit — Mr Caplan's fellow Westminster Tory councillor Richard Stirling-Gibb. Hats off to Westminster's fraudbusters!

HIC TOON

THE regime of John Cunningham, lord mayor of Newcastle, appears to be drawing to a close. After only four months in office he is under pressure from council leader Tony Flynn and senior Labour councillor Kevan Jones to step down.

When he took office earlier this year he gave a solemn pledge to colleagues that he would give up booze. But has he succeeded? At a solemn ceremony at St James's Park to unveil a statue to Jackie Milburn — who played for Newcastle United in the far-off days when they won trophies — Cunningham startled the audience. He said how glad he was to be in Walker (when he was at St James's Park), and declared that there had never been a player at Newcastle who was "anything like as good" as Milburn – causing some embarrassment to Alan Shearer, Newcastle's £15m striker, who was present.

● MORE evidence of Leeds city council's commitment to equal opportunities (see *Eye* 986). It has just reached an out-of-court settlement for discriminating against a black applicant for the job of director of education. Turning down former *Race Today* activist Gus John, erstwhile director of education in Hackney, cost Leeds £60,000.

POISON ISLE

DEADLY cyanide canisters have been found buried on land belonging to Independent Isle of Wight councillor Colin Boswell — just weeks after he was convicted on 11 counts of using illegal crop sprays and fined £220,000 (*Eyes passim*).

Acting on a tip-off, the Environment Agency swooped on Cllr Boswell's premises at Newchurch. But horrified firemen beat a retreat when they discovered what the lethal cache contained. The illegal rabbit poison, Cymag, is so toxic it has been banned since 1997 and it is even illegal to store it. If not handled properly it can release clouds of sodium cyanide gas, which causes agonising death if inhaled.

The find on Boswell's land was close to a drinking water source, although Southern Water, which is monitoring the borehole, said there was little risk of contamination. Meanwhile Boswell, who has brazened out calls for him to resign as a councillor, insists he wishes to continue, er, "serving the community". He is also staying on as an "Island Ambassador" — one of a group of leading local businessmen whose probity and success is designed to draw inward investment to the island's ailing economy. What better man for the job?

● ENTERPRISING Conwy borough council is keen to promote Llandudno as a top conference venue for the 21st century and has produced a glossy brochure extolling the North Wales resort. "Science, Sex and the Seaside" is the intriguing headline on the front page. Science *and* sex? Indeed – the brochure explains that the world's top pox doctors had an absolutely terrific time at the Medical Society for the Study of Venereal Diseases conference in Llandudno in May.

Pseuds Corner

As night falls in a park in a suburb called Inwood, two characters are locked in a fearful contest of negation that sends them mindsurfing through the high octane end of the info-spectrum. Spiralling out of control they are sucked irresistibly into a Bermuda Triangle of meaning – a Dark Pocket. Exceptionally enigmatic and some would say totally barking, this has been described as Gilbert and George waiting for Godot in a jazz cafe.

Flyer for *Dark Pocket* by Jim Neu, Rosemary Branch theatre

This shift to the web is part of my strategy to separate downstream data gathering and analysis from up-stream consultancy and campaigning. Down-stream data – such as monitoring – will be web-based and one day we hope to offer it for free. In this way we plan for our own web presence to have both "mindshare" and "stickiness".

It makes sense – by, say, end 2000 – to offer anyone political, bespoke monitoring for free via the web, so long as we have the "stickiness" (brand) to use the web as a market "portal" for our high-end, upstream consultancy (our "mindshare").

STEPHEN LOCK
(MD of Ludgate Public Affairs)
The Public Affairs Newspaper

I like to walk everywhere. It's really fashionable in New York these days, you know; they call it strolling.

MARTIN BRUDNIZKI
Guardian

"Isn't it marvellous?" as that great philosopher Tony Hancock used to say. Here I sit looking at the night sky in the middle of the Australian bush, appreciating my own insignificance. The whole night sky is upside down and insignificance feels good. Here in the middle of nowhere I appreciate

only too well that I am nobody, and yet somebody at one and the same time. Isn't it marvellous?

...Poppy and I have discovered quite a lot about life, death and the universe over the past few weeks. We are on our biennial workshop tour of New Zealand and Australia, sharing our small wisdoms with our Antipodean colleagues.

PHIL BARKER
Nursing Times

"Not not-interesting!" he snaps. "Post-interesting! Interesting doesn't pay. Well, it pays once, but not twice. I used to be interesting. I was, like, the It Boy. Being so interesting — well, it's not so interesting."

JOHN BROCKMAN
Wired

Walking Talking Boots: Mediating Relations Between Natures, Cultures and Bodies
Conceptualising walking boots and the multiple relations into which they enter, and which they mediate, through Serres' notion of the parasite, the manifold and complex shifts between the semiotic and the material, the intersubjective and the interobjective (and permutations thereof), and the broader implications of this analysis for the theorisation of the object, will be explored.

MIKE MICHAEL
(Goldsmith's College Sociology dept) – abstract of paper given at Brunel University conference on "Sociality/Materiality: The Status of the Object in Social Science"

CONTRIBUTORS: Ben Dowell, Patrick Kerr, APR, Rael Martell, Alice Goldie, Geoff Bunn.

£10 paid for entries

THE silly jibe that Tony Blair is a bit of an autocrat was firmly laid to rest at Bournemouth when he and wife Cherie made their exit from the Labour party conference.

After a tiny burst of the *Red Flag*, the choir broke into Fatboy Slim's *Praise You* as the Blairs left the podium waving and smiling and lapping up the applause. *Praise You*'s modest lyric?

We've come a long way together
Through the hard times and the good
I have to celebrate you baby
I have to praise you like I should
I have to praise you
I have to praise you like I should
I have to praise you

So, Tony's not just an autocrat and bossy boots, then – but a budding megalomaniac of messianic proportions.

LAURENCE MARKS and Maurice Gran, writers of hit sit-coms such as Birds of a Feather and er... Birds of a Feather were much in demand at the Labour conference, providing such gems as Tony Blair's "tally-ho" and a couple of cracker-mottos for Jack Straw.

John O'Farrell, author of *Things Can Only Get Better*, was not so lucky. As requested, he provided Gordon Brown with a batch of Michael Portillo gags ("he used to be a right-wing extremist, but now he's happy to tell us it was just a phase he was going through") which were duly included in the chancellor's draft. But at the last minute Brown had a sudden panic, fearful of sounding like a queer-basher, and ditched them all.

Undaunted, O'Farrell rescued his material from the waste-bin and handed it to a cabinet minister who had no inhibitions about teasing Portaloo — the openly gay Chris Smith.

SO bitter has the struggle between Scotland's first minister Donald Dewar and his old rival, Scottish secretary Dr John Reid, become that the two were said to have nearly come to blows at Labour's Bournemouth conference.

A temporary respite has come about as the gannet-faced Dewar rejoices in Reid's "Jocko lobbygate" discomfort, following the *Observer*'s revelation that Reid's lobbyist son had peddled influence for contracts. But any relief will be partial, for Reid's track record as a purveyor of the black arts is as long as it is legendary.

Scottish Labour backbenchers still recall the occasion when Reid began to take an avuncular interest in David Clark MP, then opposition defence spokesman. Clark was standing in the annual shadow cabinet elections but had fallen out of favour with the Blairites. Having ascertained the level of support Clark could command among trusting Scottish backbenchers, Reid was overheard passing on this invaluable information to Tony Blair's right hand woman, Anjii Hunter.

When Reid tried the same dirty trick the following year, the by now wised up Scots whispered that support for Clark had "plummeted" and that "he hadn't a hope in hell". Imagine Reid's spitting fury when he discovered that counter to his "intelligence", Clark had been reelected – and with an increased majority!

Still, which government department did Reid join upon Labour gaining office? Why, defence of course. And who may succeed Lord Robertson as defence secretary before long? Why, Dr John Reid. And what of David Clark? This forlorn and largely forgotten figure attempted to legislate for Labour's manifesto promise for a freedom of information bill, but unfortunately ran into the blocking ambitions of Messrs Straw and Mandelson. And where is Clark now? On the backbenches.

PLANNING officers at Westminster council were somewhat bemused in July when they received a letter from the cabinet office stating objections to proposed building work on a property in Notting Hill.

They were baffled why a roof extension in London W11 should be detaining mandarins in SW1. In fact the proposed extension overlooked the back garden of deputy secretary for defence and overseas affairs Michael Pakenham, who was concerned about the threat to the sunlight in his garden.

Westminster officials, fearing a blatant namedrop to gain preferential treatment, contacted cabinet secretary Sir Richard Wilson to find out if this use of official stationery was a breach of the rules. And it was: Pakenham received a full dressing down.

In a recent letter to Westminster council, Sir Richard pleaded in his defence thus: "Mr Pakenham tells me that he wrote on official paper because he was in a hurry, and assures me that he was not trying to exert any pressure on the council. He fully accepts that it must not happen again."

BBC bosses were quick to remove *Look East* reporter Kevin Bentley from the screen after we revealed that he had been accepted on to the Conservative party's list of approved parliamentary candidates (*Eye* 984).

Although BBC rules state that employees who are wannabe MPs should keep a low profile, Bentley had continued to report stories from East Anglian constituencies where he might have had hopes of being selected.

Now it seems there is to be another big change in his life. Bentley and his partner of about 10 years, hackette Karen Ainley, have suddenly become engaged. No doubt this has nothing to do with the fact that many Tory party members who choose prospective candidates are ladies of mature years who do not necessarily approve of modern lifestyles.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE five independent fraudbusters appointed to root out the source of the European Union's missing billions each year are tying themselves and everyone else in legal knots.

The mooted initiative "Corpus Juris" was rejected in this country by a Lords select committee because it would have abolished our common laws of trial by jury and the right not to rot in prison without charge. Nor did the Lords fancy the idea of a nasty foreign Napoleonic-style public prosecutor being foist upon us (see *Eyes* 973, 975).

To placate the EU the government introduced an even more sinister counter-proposal to "mutually recognise" other EU judicial decisions despite alarming differences in procedures. At a Lords select committee hearing the case of an English woman sentenced to 11 years in her absence in Italy, a normal procedure there, was cited. And Stephen Jakobi, of Fair Trials Abroad, told of the many problems common in other member states – from "ignoring the law and by-passing judicial procedures" to a "disinclination to acquit defendants with a preference to adjourning cases so the prosecution could find more evidence"..

The fraudbusters have conceived a third way to unify EU legal systems: a European prosecutor's office overseeing the commission itself, a national prosecution office for European offences in each member state under a Brussels-appointed prosecutor – and a European prosecution officee incorporating, you guessed it, Corpus Juris.

How will Britain react? As international jurist Torquil Dick Eriksson put it: "It appears not one British university has a chair of comparative criminal procedure. The government is floundering about like a trapped seal waiting to be clubbed to death."

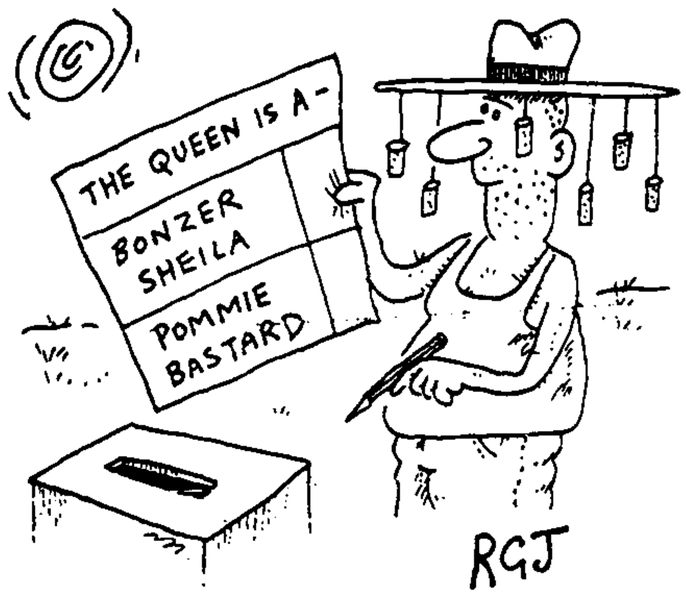
JUST FANCY THAT!

FORMER United States senator George Mitchell took a break from the ailing Ulster peace process last week to attend the Belfast launch of a transatlantic cancer research initiative.

He movingly said: "Many others before me have drawn an analogy between cancer and Northern Ireland's difficulties. At times both are working under the surface, working to destroy."

Strange he did not mention his lucrative work in the US in recent years as a lobbyist for, er, the tobacco industry.

That Aussie Republican Referendum...



FRINGE BENEFITS

LABOUR was keen not to repeat any of last year's sponsorship embarrassments at its party conference in Bournemouth two weeks ago. But there were no such qualms on the fringe.

Things kicked off on Monday with Jack Straw's contribution to a Fabian debate on a "racist-free Britain". This was sponsored by law firm Dibb Lupton Alsop, which has recently begun offering big employers a consultancy service on how to avoid labour regulations and get round union law.

On Tuesday the crowd-puller was David Blunkett's talk to the Fabians on "Ending Social Exclusion". His appearance was sponsored by fat cat favourites Wessex Water, who spearheaded the drive for budget meters, which cut off water supplies to those too poor to buy pre-payment cards. The scheme has been ruled illegal.

Blunkett appeared again on Wednesday speaking on "the Future of Welfare". This meeting was organised by think-tank Demos and sponsored by Natwest, which has a great interest in the subject. In 1997 it put 10,000 staff on to welfare with a £270m redundancy and reconstruction programme.

There was big disappointment for delegates heading for trade secretary Steven Byers' talk on "holding government and companies to account". Hosts on this occasion were lottery firm Camelot, whose 90 percent executive salary increases turned out not even to be accountable to the government, to the chagrin of Chris Smith. In the event, Byers was unable to attend.

On Thursday Michael Meacher addressed delegates at Bourne Hall on "environmental modernisation" courtesy of Carillion. Carillion is an offshoot of Tarmac, whose best-known environmental modernisation products to date have been the bypass over Twyford Down and the Manchester Airport extension.

And even the social conscience of the Cabinet, international development secretary Clare Short, did her bit at a meeting on "social justice in a global economy" sponsored by engineering multinational Asea Brown Boveri. ABB has been involved in such prime examples of social justice as market rigging cartels (for which it received a $50m fine from the European commission last year), acid pollution ($45m from a US jury in 1992), and enforced displacement (1.2 million Chinese people to be displaced to make way for a dam on the Yangtze in 2003). With all this going on on the fringes, who needs a Somerfield supermarket pass for the main conference?

KICKED UPSTAIRS

THE usual complaint against hereditary peers is that they are allowed a voice in parliament even though they are unelected. But what of those life peers who have been kicked upstairs as a reward for being unelect*able*?

The *Eye* kicks off this new series with a look at **Lord Lamont of Lerwick**.

Previously Norman Lamont, the Conservative member for Kingston, the former chancellor stood for Harrogate in 1997 where he turned a Conservative majority of 9,000 into a Lib Dem one of 6,000. Such an achievement deserves a reward, and Lamont promptly bounced into the Upper House, where he has managed an impressive 14 attendances in his first session. Perhaps he has been too busy working on his memoirs.

FOCUS ON UKIP

ONLY a few months after having three candidates elected to the European parliament, the UK Independence party gathered in Solihull for its annual conference a fortnight ago. What should have been a euphoric victory rally soon degenerated into an orgy of sackings, accusations of betrayal and threats of legal action.

Much of the indignation was provoked by Michael Holmes MEP, a multi-millionaire who made a fortune from free newspapers before devoting himself to the Euro-bashing cause. When UKIP leader Alan Sked resigned after the 1997 general election, Holmes was appointed to succeed him on the assumption that someone with so much money must be a smart operator (and might hand over some of the loot). Alas, in the words of one UKIP veteran, it has since become apparent that Holmes "hasn't a brain in his head".

For many members the last straw was Holmes's maiden speech to the European parliament in which he said that MEPs should have more powers — a policy wildly at variance with UKIP's belief in Westminster sovereignty. Holmes at first tried to explain the gaffe by saying he didn't realise his speech would be recorded. He then sent a circular to members revealing what he had meant to say: that Strasbourg should have more powers *if* there were a European superstate — which, of course, he opposed. Unfortunately, he added, there was a 90-second time limit for speeches and he had therefore been cut off before he could complete his sentence.

None of this cut much ice with the party's national executive, who passed a motion of no confidence and demanded that he should resign as leader at the party conference. He agreed to do so — and signed a legal undertaking to that effect — on condition the executive stood down as well.

By the time they assembled in Solihull, however, Holmes had apparently changed his mind. The national executive was sacked *en masse* – whereupon Holmes announced that he would carry on as leader after all. Holmes and fellow MEP Nigel Farage, the party's chairman, then raced down to UKIP's head office in Regent Street, London. On arrival they found that party secretary Tony Schofield (who pays the rent on the office) had got there first and taken the precaution of changing the locks. Undaunted, the two Euro-parliamentarians broke the door open and took away armfuls of files and computer discs.

Nigel Farage claimed that Conservative Central Office had been trying to get hold of a list of UKIP's candidates from the Euro-elections, and it was therefore essential to "remove member-sensitive material to a secure location". But since the names and addresses of all candidates were published at the time of the election, as required by law, this seems a rather implausible justification for his late-night smash-and-grab raid.

Holmes's friends have since produced a new issue of the party newsletter defending these antics, but it has been halted on legal advice — apparently for fear of the number of libel writs it might elicit.

Meanwhile ex-secretary Schofield and another sacked member of the executive, Damian Hockney, are planning to sue Holmes for reneging on his promise to quit. Legal bills should be no obstacle: Hockney, who has made a small fortune from publishing magazines such as *Hair & Beauty* and *Hair Now*, recently spent £8,500 on a "nose-job", plus further large sums on nips, tucks and liposuction treatment. His next ambitious plan is to have a "buttock implant" to make his bum look sexier.

Unhappily for Messrs Holmes and Farage, Hockney is also UKIP's parliamentary candidate in Kensington and Chelsea. It would be an exciting novelty to have a candidate in a high-profile by-election who is engaged in litigation against his own party leader, but a more likely outcome is that he'll run as an independent — thus causing yet more embarrassment and confusion. A wad of internal emails from leading party members, leaked to the *Eye*, reveals that morale is already rock-bottom. "For Christ's sake!!!" one exclaims. "What will it make us look like if this news leaks? A bunch of hopeless prats, or something similar."

'Backbiter'

9.30 CHOICE **Tony's People** New series examining the impact of the new Labour revolution on the Prime Minister's own constituents in Sedgefield (1/5) (T) (87588)

10.00 The Sopranos Tony is numbed by an increased dose of anti-depressants (T) (3588)

The Times

Letters

Who he

Sir,

Where was fucking "Celeb" last issue? I'm lost now. I don't know how to act, what to say or do. Please don't upset my life again in this careless manner.

PETE TOWNSHEND,

Via e-mail.

Lookalike

Cherie

Morticia

Sir,

Tony Blair's party conference attack on Messrs Heseltine, Clarke, Redwood and Hague — in which he referred to them as "the Addams family" — was clearly meant affectionately. How can it have been otherwise when Blair is himself married to Morticia Addams, she of the vampire mouth and strange diaphanous dresses?

Yours,
ENA B. FESTER.

Killing joke

Sir,

Since there is nothing remotely funny about the suicide rate among farmers the Cluff cartoon (Eye 986) is unwelcome and uncalled for.

Go and stand in the corner, you silly little boy, and contemplate the feebleness of your flaccid little organ!

Yours faithfully,
JOHN M. JOHNSON,

Stockport.

Alfred the grater

Sir,

In his letter (Eye 986) Ian Duncan, Executive Councillor, claims that 14,000 homes were surveyed on the future of the King Alfred leisure centre. I have yet to meet anyone who received such a survey or who approves of the plans.

The strange thing is that I live within half a mile of the King Alfred site and will be directly affected by the development. Perhaps Mr Duncan could explain exactly where the surveys were sent?

MARK TENNENT,

Via e-mail.

Poet cornered

Sir,

Regarding the poem by David Griffiths published in London Mensa News of October 1999 and reproduced in Poetry Corner, Eye 986, I would like to make it clear that neither the editor nor anyone else involved in publishing LMN was aware of Dave Griffiths' intentions.

London Mensa has no sympathy whatsoever with David Griffiths or the ideas he has expressed.

The poem was deliberately obscure and would certainly never have been published had its nature been understood. London Mensa apologises unreservedly for any offence it may have caused.

ANDREW LOGAN,

Chairman, London Mensa.

HB Source

Sir,

I normally say "publish and be damned" about my brush (HP Sauce, Eye 1 October) with Housing Benefit regulations. I stupidly and wrongly forged my landlord's signature on a rent book because the landlord refused as he did not want unemployed people in his house. He received my legitimate benefit. I didn't get a penny out of it. I then did 80 hours' community service.

I am proud to have organised the Ulster Fry at the Labour Party conference which did its bit for bringing people together. Those who eat together stay together? I felt slightly miffed, however, as I often seem to be the only one on the Irish circuit who has served his whole sentence.

Yours sincerely,
JAMES WINSTON,

London N1.

Baton charge

Sir,

What a shame that the "Operational Support Group" sent in to beat up Liverpool fans and local shoppers couldn't show the restraint that is all too apparent in their chief constable Norman Bettison — an anagram of his name being BATON INNERMOST.

Yours sincerely,
PAUL CARDIN,

Via e-mail.

Not Nice...

Sir,

I don't know who your source is in the campaign against Russell Davies but he's making you look silly. Paul Desmond was an altoist.

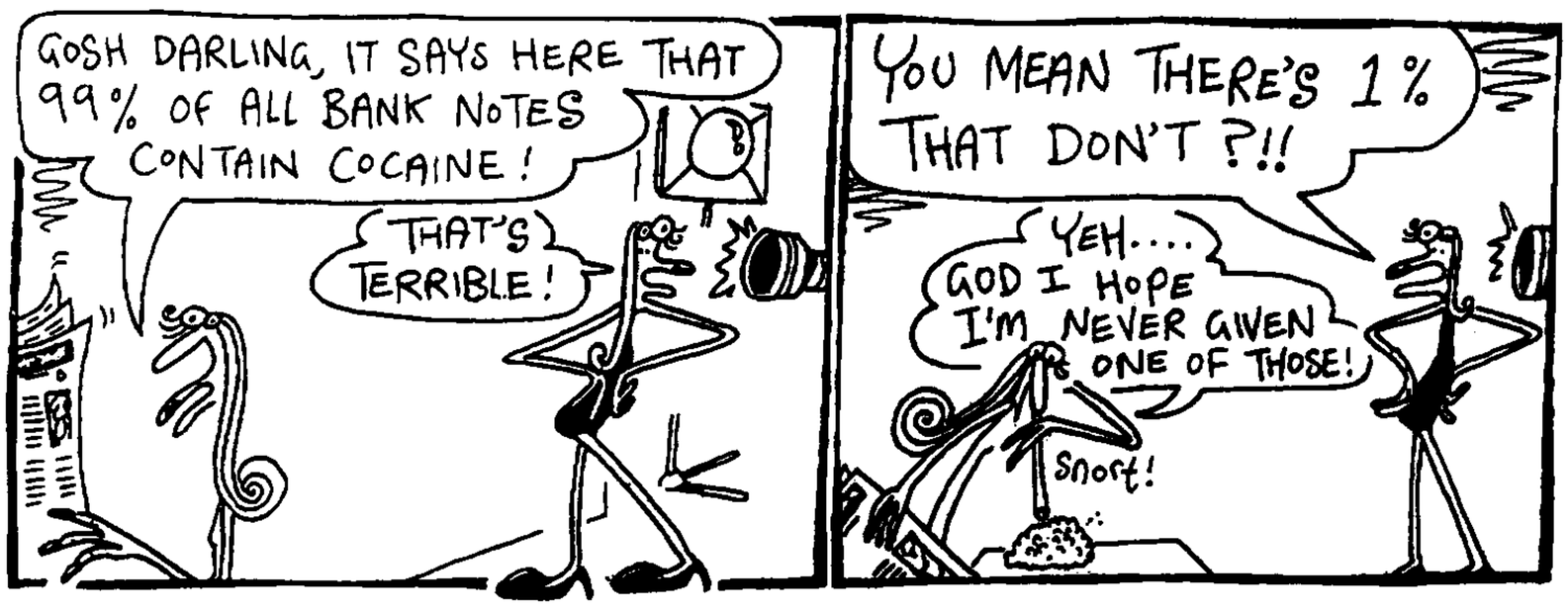
Even if he weren't, and Davies had got it wrong, would it really merit column inches in your otherwise esteemed organ? Come on, aim a little higher. (Or have I missed the point?)

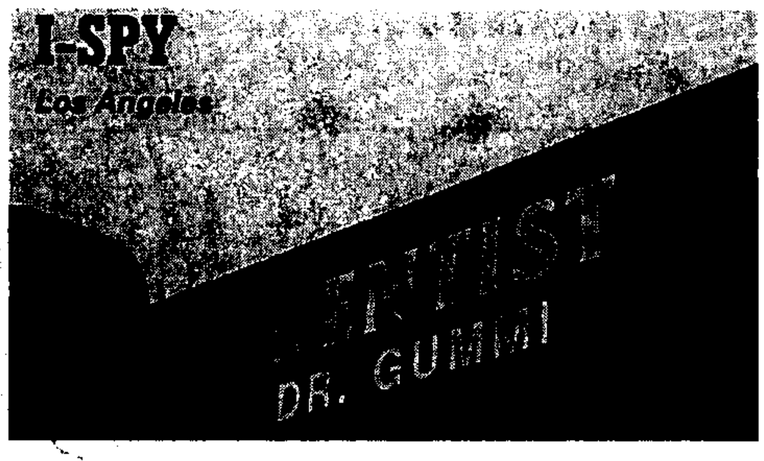
Cheers,
GARRY BOOTH,

Via e-mail.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


GOSH DARLING, IT SAYS HERE THAT 99% OF ALL BANK NOTES CONTAIN COCAINE!
THAT'S TERRIBLE!
YOU MEAN THERE'S 1% THAT DON'T?!!
YEH.... GOD I HOPE I'M NEVER GIVEN ONE OF THOSE!
Snort!



Submitted by Robert Moore. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Foxed

Sir,

Re: A ban on fox hunting. Both our urban and rural communities have valid claims and in order to resolve the issue a compromise is clearly necessary. To please all parties the government may wish to consider banning fox hunting in all major towns and cities and restrict the activity to the countryside.

Yours faithfully,
ALISTAIR SOMERVILLE FORD,
Chief Executive ICM.

LUVVIES

"I always fall in love while I'm working on a film. It's such an intense thing, being absorbed into the world of a movie. It's like discovering you have a fatal illness, with only a short time to live. So you live and love twice as deeply. Then you slip out of it, like a snakeskin, and you're cold and alone."

ANGELINA JOLIE
Sunday Times

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Injury time

Sir,

M.D. obviously needed to think up a couple of risky "amateur sporting events" to flesh out his story about untrained ambulance crews (Doing The Rounds, Eye 986).

While I have no comment to make about gymkhanas, he picked a wrong 'un with his choice of rallycross. Minimum medical cover at a rallycross is one doctor or NHS-registered paramedic, one ambulance (St John, St Andrew or British Red Cross) and one licensed rescue unit.

Every competitor is licensed by the UK governing body and has to pass a medical; anyone with a medical condition carries a special mark on the car to alert marshals.

'Nuff said, indeed.

Yours sincerely,
COLIN WILSON,
Motor Sports Association, Colnbrook.

Free speech?

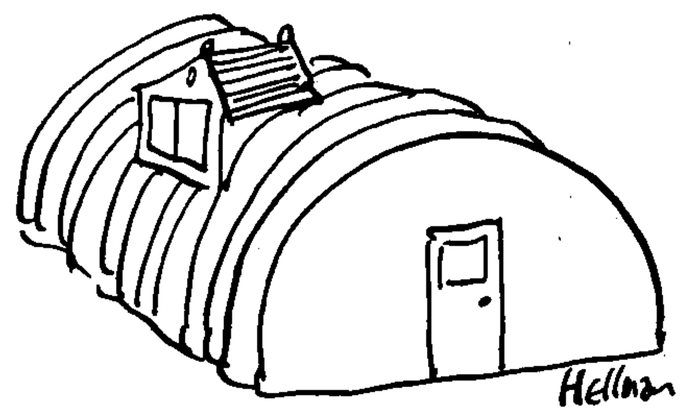
Sir,

The reason for Talk Radio's dwindling phoner-uppers has more to do with the withdrawal of their Freephone lines and the imposing of 10p a minute calls (national rates) than the recent programming changes.

Yours faithfully,
BOUDICCA WOOLF (Ms),
Portsmouth, Hants.

PS: I've been brief because I'm a first-time correspondent and nervous!

GREY ARIAS



"Nissen Dormer"

Stuck in the Gullit

Sir,

Whilst not wishing to nitpick, I think that your "Roy of the Rovers" cartoon in issue 986 rather missed the point. I'm sure that Ruud Gullit's slower more deliberate English would have made more sense to the rather cosmopolitan crowd that is the Newcastle Utd football team than Bobby Robson's Geordie ramblings. If memory serves me correct I think that you will find that the only Geordie in the first eleven is Alan "Dobbin" Shearer.

Yours faithfully,
STUART ORCHARD,
Via e-mail.

Rugger buggers?

Sir,

As an Old Petrean I was perturbed to read Edward Norman's comments on student life in Peterhouse (Oh Yeah? 1 Oct). While I was an undergraduate (1968-71) I belonged to the rugby club, but I never once dressed up as a woman at any social event, or indeed on any other occasion. Does this mean that I am not, in Norman's words, "normal"? Or perhaps normality became evident after the arrival of young Portillo (by which time I was a research student and married, presumably also not "normal" behaviour?)

Methinks the Grand Old Ex-Dean's memory is failing him.

Yours abnormally,
BOB CHAPMAN,
Via e-mail.

Collapsing in giggles?

Sir,

Your article in Funny Old World (985) concerning the collapse of sewerage systems in Honduras was decidedly perplexing.

Throughout the Central America region, aged sewerage systems are collapsing due to the effects of Hurricane Mitch and, as a consequence, entire water systems are being contaminated. Sadly, this results in death tolls going into tens of thousands and, with little foreign aid going to help relieve the situation, it would appear that the death rate will not be stemmed for the foreseeable future.

For me, it is hard to think of anything as tragic or infuriating as the occurrence of unnecessary, avoidable deaths, so why do you find the situation so funny?

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL LETCHFORD,
Co-ordinator, Newcastle Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign.

Tweet charity

Sir,

Re: Birds in Winter. It has come to my attention that many British birds die each winter as a result of cold and hunger. This does not surprise me in the least.

Why, for goodness sake, do they not make better use of their nest-building abilities to provide some winter shelter? Sitting on a damp twig in the middle of a frosty night is, you must agree, asking for health problems. With a modicum of thought and planning, of which, let's face it, they seem perfectly capable in the spring, they could provide reasonably snug winter accommodation. Winter nests. Why not?

Hunger is another of their persistent complaints. Call me unsympathetic if you will, but to my mind it is wisdom to put a bit away at times of plenty for "a rainy day". Birds seem to have developed this dependant trait: happy to gorge themselves in the balmy days of plenty, and rely upon us to dangle unsightly and unhygienic bits of bacon in our gardens as soon as the thermometer drops a bit.

"Come on now, birds! There really is no reason why you can't put a bit of energy into erecting a small but efficient larder next to your winter quarters."

I do hope you will be able to pass on these suggestions, and that they will prove useful to our feathered friends in the years ahead. I'm all for birds, in reasonable numbers, but I'll admit that I'm less inclined to throw them crumbs if I think that they're simply sponging on the rest of us.

Yours faithfully,
STEPHEN SMITH (New Labour),
Totnes, Devon.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

Commentator: *Bob, he won't get an easier shot than that, will he?*
Bob: *Well, he would if the ball was closer to the hole.*
Sky Sports
(R Peterson)

"If I've seen two more competitive players [than Armstrong and Van der Westheizen], I've yet to see them."
GAVIN HASTINGS, ITV
(Duncan McGregor)

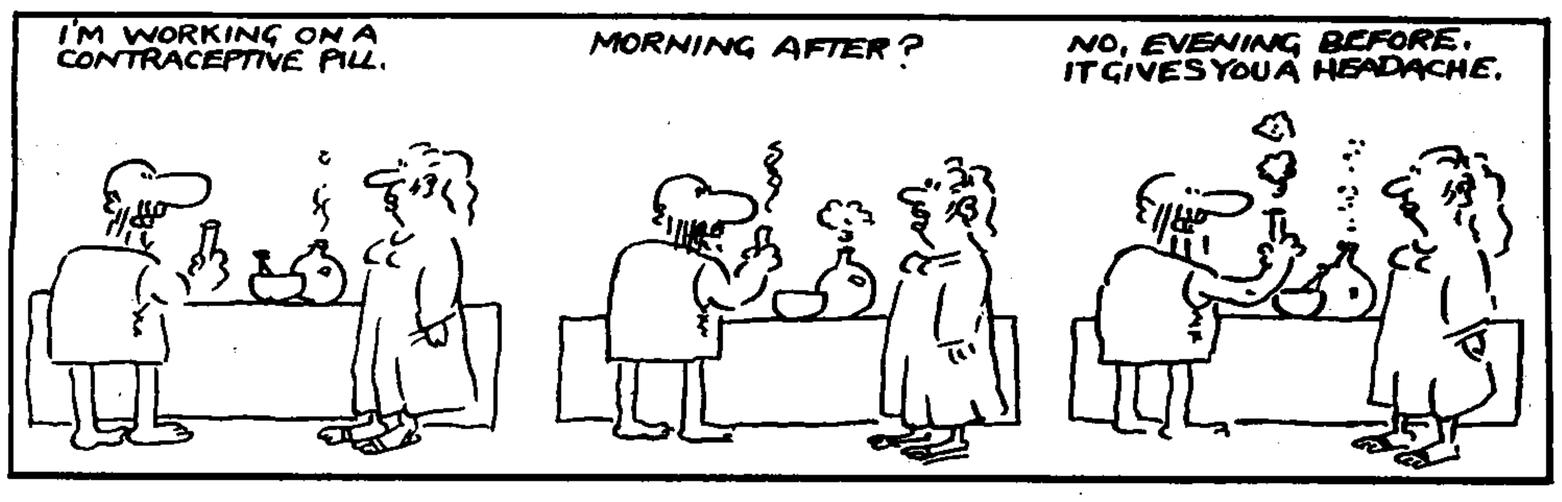
"Prison... is and never has been a soft option."
ANN WIDDECOMBE, BBC2
(Joe Lamb)

"Scotland were victims of their own failure."
GAVIN HASTINGS, ITV
(R.G. Hart)

"The theme of this year's race is Robin Hood, so here to start us off are the Three Musketeers."
PA Announcer, Nottingham Marathon
(Will Morlidge)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● **"People are taking a different view of funerals nowadays; they've become a positive celebration of life," said Betty Young-McIntire of the California Funeral Directors' Association as she opened the Death Care World Expo 99 in Reno, Nevada. "Gloomy, grief-filled funerals are things of the past in America. Nowadays, the bereaved expect a good time when they bury their loved ones.**

"We've helped fishermen who wanted to be buried in caskets shaped like boats, and sports car enthusiasts whose family chose sports car-shaped models. We offer golfers our Fairway to Heaven model, with a simulation of the 18th hole at Pebble Beach, and surf-board caskets for surfers. For a tasteful ceremony, why not try our EternalLite, a cremation urn with a computer-chip attachment that simulates a flickering candle and plays selections from the hit musical "Annie"? Or for $7,000, we can arrange for your ashes to be placed aboard a commercial satellite and be

sent into orbit. We've already turned Timothy Leary and Gene Rodenberry into posthumous astronauts, and we can do it for you too." *(Australian Cemetery & Crematoria News, Autumn 1999. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)*

—●—

● "I'm not just selling urine, I'm selling privacy, freedom, and the American Way of Life" declared Kenneth Curtis, founder of the Privacy Protection Service in Greenville, South Carolina. "My urine is pure, natural, organic, and I swear on the American flag that I've never had a customer fail a test."

Curtis began his business a year ago, in response to the increasing frequency of random drug tests in the American workplace. "I was being tested a dozen times a year at the place I used to work. I live a very clean life, but it irked me, so I started advertising a 'Urine Test Substitution Kit,' and was overwhelmed with customers. For $69 plus postage, you get five ounces of my urine, 30 inches of plastic tubing, and a tiny heat pack to keep the fluid at body temperature. With the pack taped to the body, anyone can pass the urine off as his own, and know that he'll pass any drug test, no matter what he does in his private life."

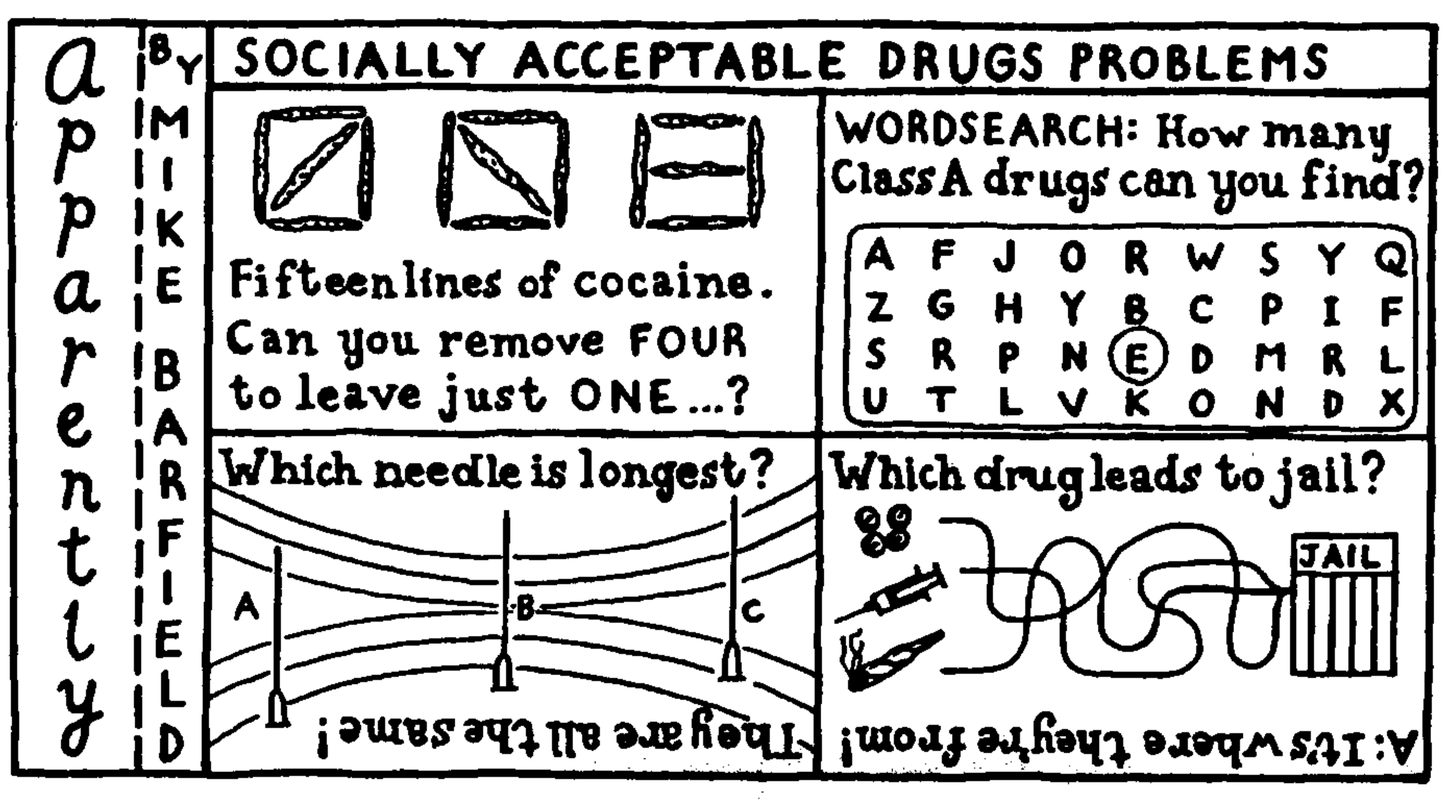
The success of Curtis's business has angered politicians, including South Carolina state Senator David Thomas, who drafted a bill banning the sale of urine. "Scum like you typify what's worst about this country!" Thomas shouted at Curtis during a hearing on the bill. "Everybody else is trying to clean up drugs, and you're trying to put more into society."

The bill became law in June, but Curtis's business is still thriving. "I'm selling urine, not drugs," he told reporters, "and urine has been around for a long time. I only sell my own produce, which means that I always void my bladder into a refrigerated receptacle. I freeze it all. Don't waste a drop. It's literally liquid gold." *(San Jose Mercury News, 4/9/99. Spotter: Christopher Williams)*

—●—

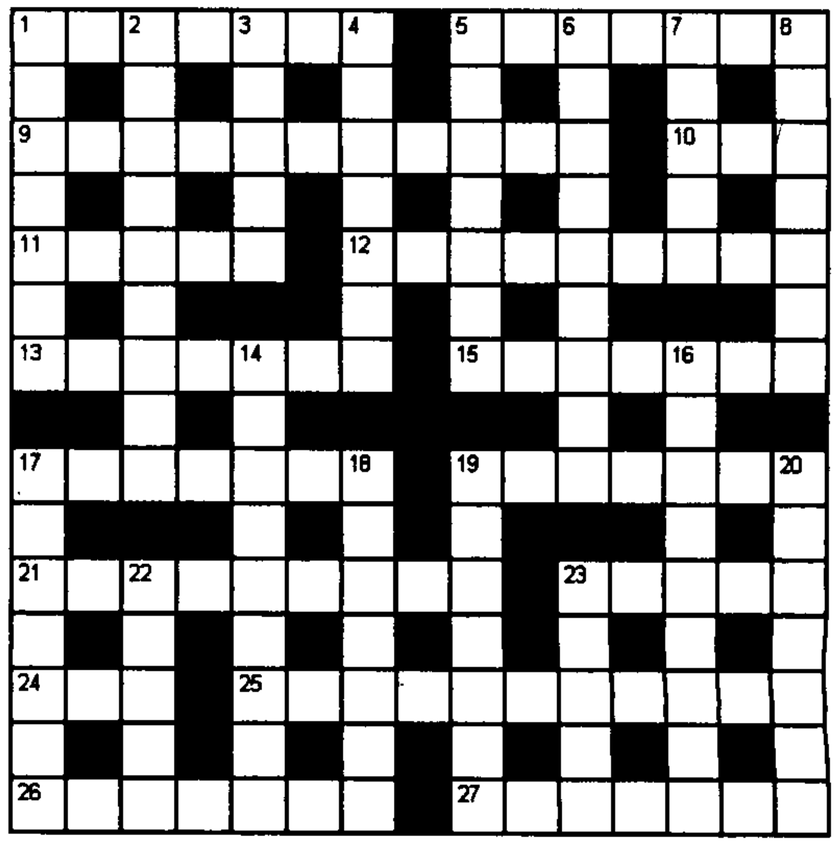
● *"It's a disgrace," said a spokesman for striking anatomy professors at a protest rally outside the Honduran National Autonomous University. "Before Victor Ramos became dean of the medical school, we used to receive thirty cadavers a semester, which was enough to satisfy all our research and teaching needs. But since he took over, the number has fallen to one or two per semester, and sometimes none. We need more bodies."*

But a university spokesman was unrepentant as he defended the dean's policy. "The cadaver supply has dwindled because of road improvements, and a new law that prevents public prosecutors from donating the bodies of murder and accident victims to us. There's nothing we can do. To be blunt, it would be really hard for the dean of the medical school to satisfy this need on his own, unless he goes out on the street with a pistol in his hand." (Gulf News, 7/9/99. Spotter: Ian Philliskirk)


apparently
BY MIKE BARFIELD
SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE DRUGS PROBLEMS
Fifteen lines of cocaine. Can you remove FOUR to leave just ONE...?
WORDSEARCH: How many Class A drugs can you find?
A F J O R W S Y Q
Z G H Y B C P I F
S R P N E D M R L
U T L V K O N D X
Which needle is longest?
A
B
C
They are all the same!
Which drug leads to jail?
JAIL
A: It's where they're from!

EYE CROSSWORD 142

by Cyclops *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1 Kinky, sly — wear silks (7)
5 Triumphal Maggie's cry about familiar Liberal leader being on the rocks (7)
9/10 Where attention-seeking politicians like to be — not in the capitalised private one! (2,3,6,3)
10 (see 9)
11 Fantastic goers, big men! (5)
12 One who enjoys sex objectively? (9)
13 The little cow rounds on the police with description of resting member (7)
15 Live-in lover? — boring idiot endlessly after a bit! (7)
17 Trooper possibly in Menswear erroneously (7)
19 Labour is now ripe for remodelling (2,5)
21 Looking for sexual arousal (9)
23 Polish love this opera singer (5)
24/4 Olive might take a running jump! (3,7)
25 Troubled development of crazy Harry, a C&W fan (6,5)
26 Put off when Brenda's out of Garters (7)
27 Pissed person walking dog (7)

DOWN

1 Shagged, out of sorts and out of a job (4,3)
2 Piss politely on wicket causing major political scandal (9)
3 Jugs were jiggling above Sophie's top (5)
4 (see 24)
5 Sort of bureau that puts spin on the crown (4-3)
6 DJ's trick for keeping equipment safely in place (9)
7 Brits once held in police nick (5)
8 Decision-maker preferred love with scrubber finally (7)
14 Princely description of a despised erection! (9)
16 The latest exposure of member's programme interruption (9)
17 Rescues, without the help of Left, uncivilised types (7)
18 Reportedly pissed, acted like Brenda (7)
19 Bad, bad Liam's snorting mega alternative (7)
20 Skimpy jumper on model pro to provide incitement (4,3)
22 Old rock group holds up sex — are such beasts real? (5)
23 Polite Japanese person, someone on the fiddle? (5)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 22.10.99. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 141

Winner: P. JOHNSON

ACROSS: 6 Cock-up 8 Reactors 10 Armani suit 11 Spit 12 Smoke 13 Fay Weldon 17 (see 2 dn) 18 Mandelson 19 Score 22 Etna 24 (see 23) 26 Reunions 27 Fuhrer.

DOWN: 1 Pogrom 2/17ac Split Personalities 3 Urdu 4 Party whip 5 Traitors 7 Knackered 9 TLS 14 Alamo 15 Loincloth 16 Hollywood 17 Prattled 20 Rubber 21 Serfs 23/24 Ann Widdecombe 25 Dose.

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

The Parish News is proud and privileged to be able to publish for the first time the full, abridged, authorised version of the historic sermon delivered by the Vicar to a rapt congregation of thousands at the Church of St Conference Centre, Bournemouth (and written by myself A.C.! Editor).

Brothers and sisters!

It's marvellous to be here, and everyone is very welcome! Especially any foxes who want to join us!

No, but seriously, my text today is taken from that great reformer and modernist, St Martin Luther the King. "Set my people free." That's what he said. And isn't that, in a very real sense, what we at St Albion's are trying to do?

What do we want to be set free from? I will tell you. They're what I call "the three Ps"!

We want to be free from PREJUDICE!

We want to be free from PRIVILEGE!

We want to be free from the PAST!

The old days are gone! In St Albion's today anybody is free to join us in church and to help us in our work!

You don't have to be rich! (Though there's nothing wrong with being rich!)

You don't have to have a fancy title to your name! (Although many of our friends have one!)

You don't have to have a posh voice and a private education! (Though the fact that I have, and Mr Prescott doesn't, is a definite advantage!)

There's no difference nowadays between the classes. We don't have the Squire sitting in the front pew and the poor man standing at the back!

Today the front pew is reserved for anyone, from any background, who wants to give a large donation to the running of the church!

So, that's why it is important that we identify all those forces which are holding us back in our great mission.

You know, some people say they no longer believe in the devil! But we in this church know better.

We know that the devil is at work everywhere. The forces of devil-ism are constantly at work, trying to undermine everything I do!

If you want to know who the devil is, I'll tell you!

The devil is the grumpy old parishioner who sits at the back complaining about all the changes I'm making!

The devil is the man in Tesco's who thinks he knows better than I do!

The devil is the man in the Cool Britannia Arms who tries to make silly jokes at my expense!

The devil is anyone in the parish who does not believe with every fibre of his being that what I am trying to do is the only way, the one true way, the third way!

(Ovation)

Wasn't it Our Lord who said "I am the good shepherd, and you lot are just a load of

useless sheep who should do what you are told" *(Book of St Tony the Divine, Ch. 12)*?

So, let us all stand and renounce the devil and all his works, in all his many disguises.

The devil in the cloth cap. The devil in hunting pink. The devil in ermine robes. The devil carrying a handbag.

The small, bald sixth-form devil who thinks he's so clever.

(Laughter and applause)

When I see all these devils trying to oppose me, I think of that great Victorian saint, St Oscar of Reading, who described them as "the unbearable in pursuit of the unbeatable (ie me)".

(Laughter)

Remember, you are all free! So, please feel free to stand up and applaud for as long as you like!

(Huge ovation lasting for five hours)

From the Postbag...

Dear Sir,

As an old-age parishioner who has been on every parish outing since 1928, I would like to say how disgusted I was at the dropping of the traditional hymn at the end of this year's outing: "There Is A Red Flag Far Away". Instead, we were all expected to sing a tuneless new song (no doubt written by the Vicar) which

Yours faithfully,
Barbara Castle (Mrs),
The Very Old Folks Home,
Keir Hardie Close.

Dear Sir,

As headmistress of St Fees Boarding School I was delighted to be asked to bring our school jazz band to play at the St Albion's Parish Outing disco. All was going very well – and our girls were in the middle of Glenn Miller's Chatanooga Choo Choo when

Yours faithfully,
M. Rutherford (Miss),
St Fees, Bournemouth.

The Editor reserves the right to cut all letters designed to embarrass the Vicar on the grounds that their authors are obviously in league with the devil. A.C.

To Remember In Your Prayers

...Mr Paul Johnson, once a devout believer, who has recently lost his faith. If it were not un-Christian to say so, we might suggest that our Paul deserves a jolly good spanking from his lady friend! T.B.

PCC Notices

● Mr Cunningham has decided to step down as Churchwarden. This is a very sad day for all of us – but especially Jack because he wasn't up to the job and should have resigned ages ago. Our thoughts go with you.

● Mrs Mowlam has done such a good job running the St Albion Mission to St Gerry's in Northern Ireland that she is to come home at once and take over Mr Cunningham's job.

● Mr Dobson has decided that he is giving up his job running the St Albion's Cottage Hospital in order to devote his energies full-time to playing the part of Dick Whittington in the Millennium Pantomime. This may come as a surprise to Frank, but it is really what he wants most and will stop Mr Livingstone from making a fool of himself. The last time he played the Mayor of London he got all the lines wrong and tried to upstage the Vicar! And we don't want that, do we?

● My friend Mr Mandelson will take over from Mrs Mowlam due to overwhelming public demand (from myself) for his reappointment to the PCC!

TEXT OF THE WEEK

"There is greater joy in Heaven over one sinner who doesn't repent, but is a friend of mine and is forgiven anyway, than in 99 righteous folk who get the sack."

(The Re-elevation of St Peter, Ch. 7, v. 9-11)

X X X A Big Thank You! X X X

The Vicar would like to thank everyone who worked so hard behind the scenes to make our Bournemouth outing such a triumph.

In particular, we all owe a great debt of gratitude to **Mr Marks** and **Mr Gran** of the Birds Of A Feather Joke and Novelty Shop in the High Street for supplying such excellent "gags" to liven up the Vicar's speech. It's not giving away any trade secrets to reveal that the joke about "What a stupid hunt" was theirs!

Many thanks to **Mr Sainsbury** for his generous contribution to the harvest festival. He filled the entire nave with one tomato which smelt marvellously of haddock! We are sending it to East Timor as a harvest gift. T.B.

St Albion's Playschool

Mrs Enver Hodge has issued the following new guidelines for all 3-year-olds.

They will be expected to: 1. Paint a recognisable picture of the Vicar.

2. Model a plasticine replica of the Millennium Tent.

3. Be able to spell the following words: "Tony", "Blair", "Wonderful".

All parents of pupils unable to pass tests on the above will be liable to a token fine of £1,000 or imprisonment.

PRESCOTT ANNOUNCES NEW SAFETY PROCEDURES

by Our Rail Correspondent
Paddington Blair

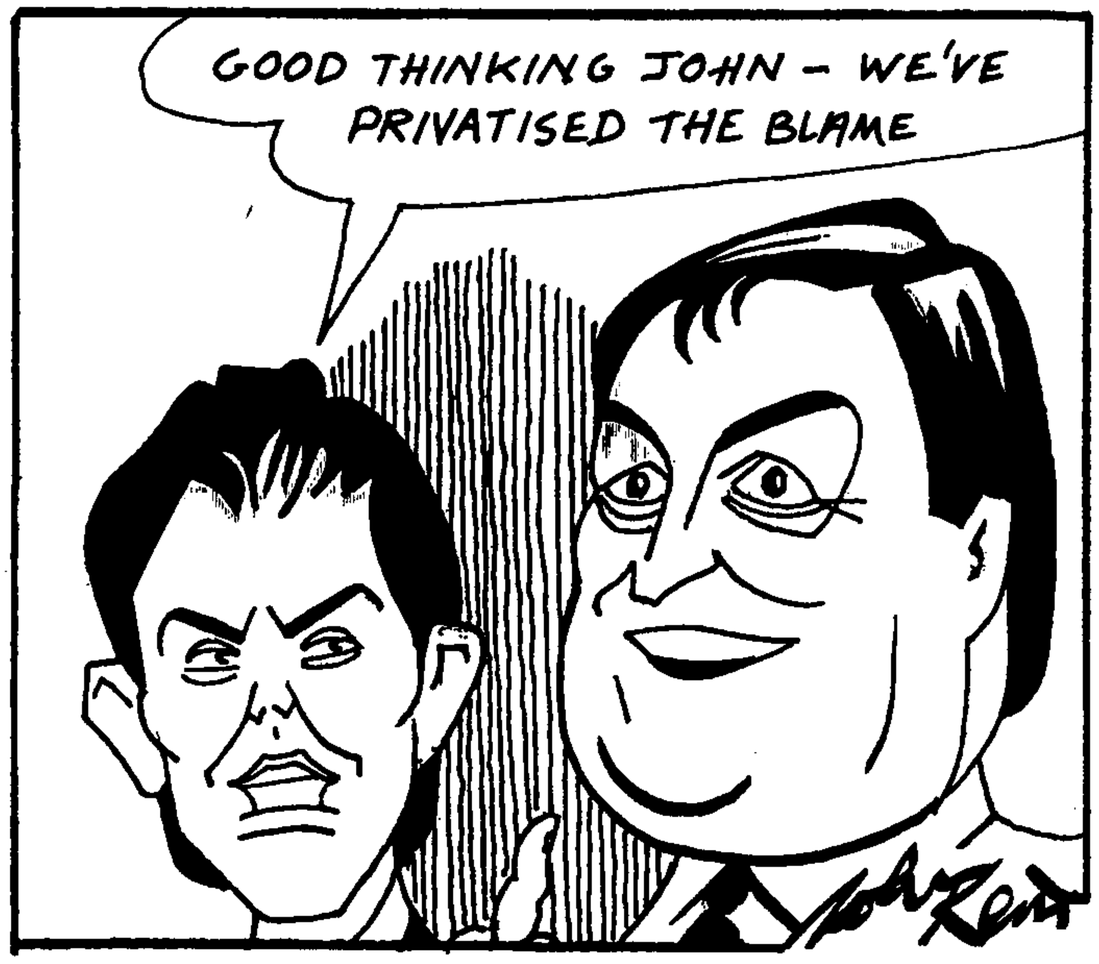
THE Transport Secretary, Mr John Prescott, yesterday unveiled sweeping new measures to ensure that safety is the number one priority for those involved in public transport.

Speaking from the mobile phone in his car, he told newsmen that he had a comprehensive 10-point plan for what action to take to prevent disaster.

THAT PLAN IN FULL

1. Blame Railtrack.
2. Blame the operating companies.
3. Announce a 10-point plan.
4. Go to work in your chauffeur-driven car.
5. Er...
6. That's it.

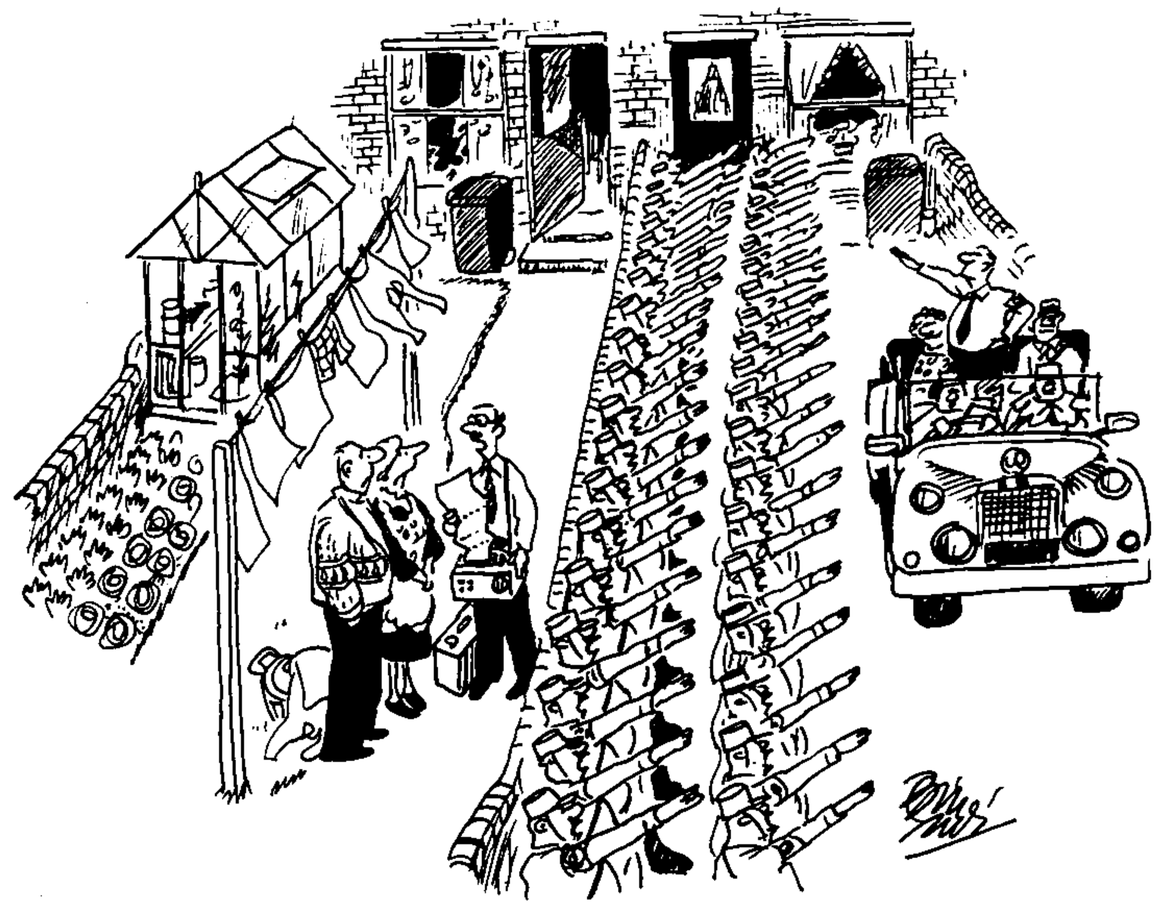
"Once you have completed this operation," said Mr Prescott, "your job as transport minister will be absolutely safe."



Radio Four **A Week In Westminster — What you won't hear any more**

(Clip of William Hague reading out joke about European Interest Rate Harmonisation)

Plummy-voiced Presenter *(For it is an O.E.)*: Crikey! That's certainly taught all those Labour oiks to watch out when Billy's about or they'll end up with a corking great bloody nose! And jolly hard cheese to them too, say I, or my name's not Beano Boris... *(cont. 94 MHz)*



"I'm afraid the decibel level does not constitute a nuisance!"

THE SCENE THAT I WILL NEVER FORGET

by Phil Ghoul

IN THE early morning mist they stood there in the deserted car park. Four solitary cars. Abandoned. Alone, where they had been standing all night.

Mute witnesses to the tragedy that they did not know would happen when they parked here.

Ghostly sentinels of doom.

A thin layer of frost coating my laptop as I tried to imagine how people would feel when they had to read this stuff.

In the silence, there was the strangled sound of a mobile phone. It was my editor asking me to go back to Paddington and write another thousand words about the twisted mass of metal bearing tragic witness to *(continued in all papers)*

Counsellors are available for readers of the above piece who may be in a state of shock.

The European Masters' Tournament circa 1700

Delhi Telegraph

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE NEW COALITION AS VOTERS GIVE UNCERTAIN SIGNALS IN RECORD POLL?
1, 2, 3, 4, 5

News In Brief

Hockey Squad Named 16
Bollywood Star To Divorce 25
London Train Crash Kills 40 94

The Secret Diary of John Major (now aged 56¾)

Monday

The big day has come and my best-selling book *John Major – The Years Of Not Inconsiderable Achievement* has been published. We have cleverly timed it to coincide with the party conference, so that instead of going on about Mrs Thatcher as usual, everyone will be talking about me.

My original thought was that I should go up to Blackpool to make a dramatic appearance on the platform in front of thousands of delegates. However, I realised that this would be in no small measure unfair to Mr Hague, since I would obviously get a standing ovation lasting for many minutes, which would make things very difficult for my successor (not that he has had very much success! That is incidentally the type of brilliant joke you will find in my book, which is now available in all leading booksellers published by Fishwick and Jackson for only £29.99).

Tuesday

The phone rings. It is the Times. "I suppose you want to interview me about my brilliant new book which is now available in all leading booksellers." "Oh no," they said, "we want to ask you whether you have any comment on Lord Norma Lamont's story about how he had to lock you in a cupboard to stop you devaluing the pound?" "I have never heard anything so outrageous in my whole life," I replied. "I have not got time to pass comment on some dreary book written by a clapped-out politician which no one is going to buy."

"You shouldn't be so hard on yourself," said my wife Norman, who had just come into the room and totally missed the point as per usual.

Wednesday

Mr Fishwick has organised a non-stop high-profile promotional tour for me, starting with a ten-minute interview on Radio Cotswold's top breakfast show "Good Morning Cirencester".

It was a long journey, which was not made any better in my judgement by having to read the front page of the Daily Telegraph which carried the headline "She's Back – Tories Welcome Hague's Predecessor With Two-Hour Ovation".

The interview did not begin well, as the young presenter said "We had your brother Terry on once, he was really good. We tried to get your long-lost sister to come on with you this morning, but we couldn't get her number. Pity, because it would have made a great human interest story, the way you pretended that you'd never heard of her."

When I remonstrated with him, and told him to ask me about the book, he said "What book? Do you mean Lord Lamont's?" Then he very rudely put on a record, thanked me for coming in and told me to take care, which in my judgement is no way to treat a former prime minister of England who has met many famous people including Mr Gorbachev and Cyril Washbrook.

Thursday

The Guardian rang up at 8 o'clock, while I was finishing my bowl of Golden Grahams (which are very superior to Honey Nut Loops in my judgement). "I expect you want to interview me about my best-selling book," I said. "Well, no, actually," replied the young lady journalist. "It's about your O-Levels. The headmaster of your old school has just told us that you never got any. But, according to the cuttings, you claim to have two. Who's telling the truth?"

"I have never heard anything so outrageous," I told her, "since I was accused of being locked in a cupboard by Mr Lamont. I haven't got time to drag up events from the past which no one is interested in," and put down the phone.

"You'll never sell any copies of your book if you take that attitude," said my wife Norman, again getting the wrong end of the stick.

Friday

The Telegraph rang me this morning, even before I had poured out my plate of Waitrose Own-Brand "Choc-o-Krispies" (which, to my mind, are markedly inferior to the original Kellogg's Coco-Pops).

"It's about the book," they said. "At last," I replied, "a serious newspaper is taking my book seriously." "Oh no," they said, "it's not your book we're interested in. It's the one by Mrs Chaplin, your former secretary. We wondered if you had any comment on her claim that you were totally obsessed by Mrs Thatcher and used to storm round Number 10 shouting 'Exterminate, exterminate' like a dalek whenever her name was mentioned."

"That is an outrageous lie," I said. "I expect Mrs Thatcher is behind this. In my judgement that woman should be exterminated."

Saturday

Today was the highlight of my promotional tour. Mr Fishwick had arranged a special "Signing Session" in the Raynes Park branch of Books R Us. In the window there was a photo of me in my cricket clothes, with a sign in big letters saying "Local Author" because I used to live there. There was also a large pile of three of my books waiting for the queues to form when I began the signing session.

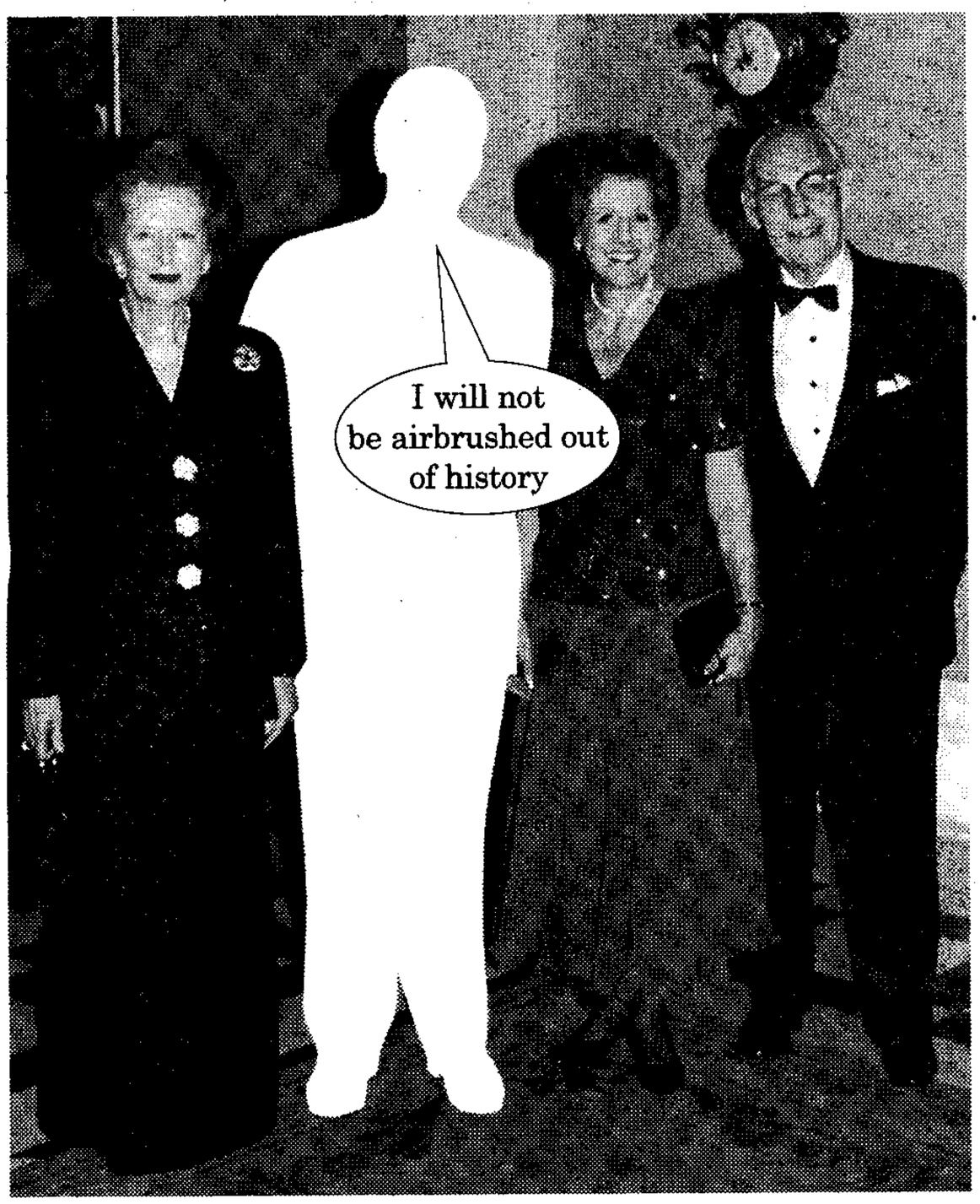
I was there for no small measure of time, ie two hours, and no one came in at all, which was not inconsiderably disappointing. "Never mind," said the kindly assistant, a young man with an earring in his nose. "No one buys books by politicians. Unless of course you are Mrs Thatcher," he laughed.

Just then my first customer arrived, in the shape of my brother Terry. "I thought I might catch you here, John," he said. "I read your book and I just wanted to tell you that it is full of mistakes. For instance, on page 712 you referred to our pet squirrel as Cyril, whereas he was actually called Len after the famous cricketer Sir Leonard Hutton."

He went on in this tiresome and outrageous fashion for a very not inconsiderable amount of time. I could only wish that my brother was "long-lost" like Mrs Lemon. Oh yes.

© *Fishcock and Tweed*

MAJOR SHOCK



BBC Highlights

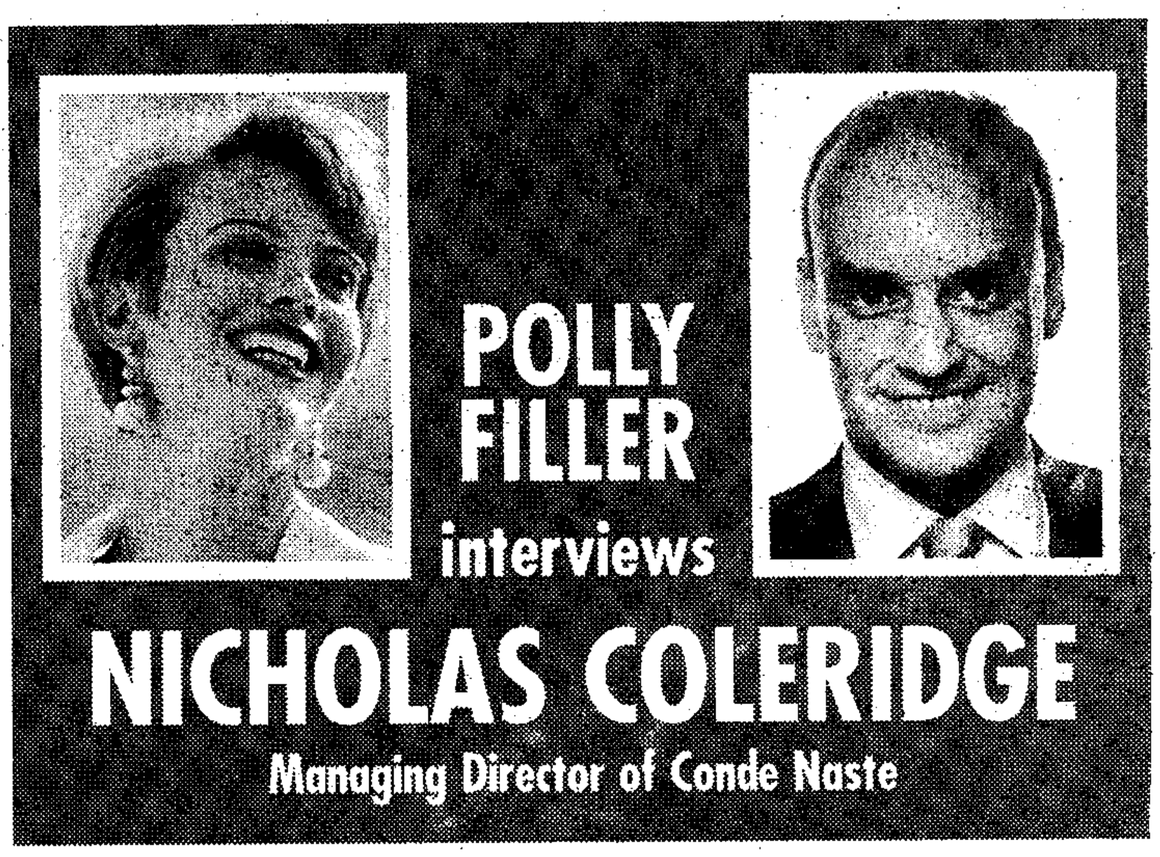
Walking With Dinosaurs
Mon 8.30

THIS WEEK: Amazing computer-generated scenes as the Bogusaurus confronts the Fakodactyl and accuses him of having no idea of how dinosaurs lived and making it up in order to dominate the ratings.

NEXT WEEK: The giant Dramadocus heads for extinction.

Monty Theme Night's Flying Python
Sat (All Night)

THE surviving members of the Conservative party meet up at Blackpool to wheel out the old jokes one more time. Don't miss "The Dead Party" sketch and Mrs Thatcher dressing up as a woman. But don't expect them to reform, as nowadays they all hate each other.



POLLY FILLER interviews NICHOLAS COLERIDGE

Managing Director of Conde Naste

HE'S GOT it all. A lovely tan, perfect teeth, a gorgeous wife, four delightful children, a beautiful house and a brilliant career as glamorous supremo of the world's best and glossiest fashion magazines. But I was determined to get beneath this perfect façade.

My first question was a tough one. "Can I have a job please, Nicholas?"

Coleridge laughs in his charming Old Etonian, best-selling way. "Ha ha ha ha!" he soothes. "My new book is a thriller set in the world of glossy magazines..."

But I am not going to let him off the hook so easily. I continue to probe him mercilessly.

"But surely there is a vacancy for a hard-working, talented female columnist who needs a well-paid post somewhere in your empire?"

Coleridge's notoriously good manners do not fail him.

"My book is not at all autobiographical," he replies. "It's not a roman-à-clef as such – more of a fictional soufflé, a literary trifle, a..."

"*Vogue* would be good," I interrupt him, determined to get the interview back on course, "or *Tatler*. Or *World of Interiors*. I'm not fussy. Would you like to see my CV?"

I hand him a neatly printed sheet which includes full details of all my qualifications.

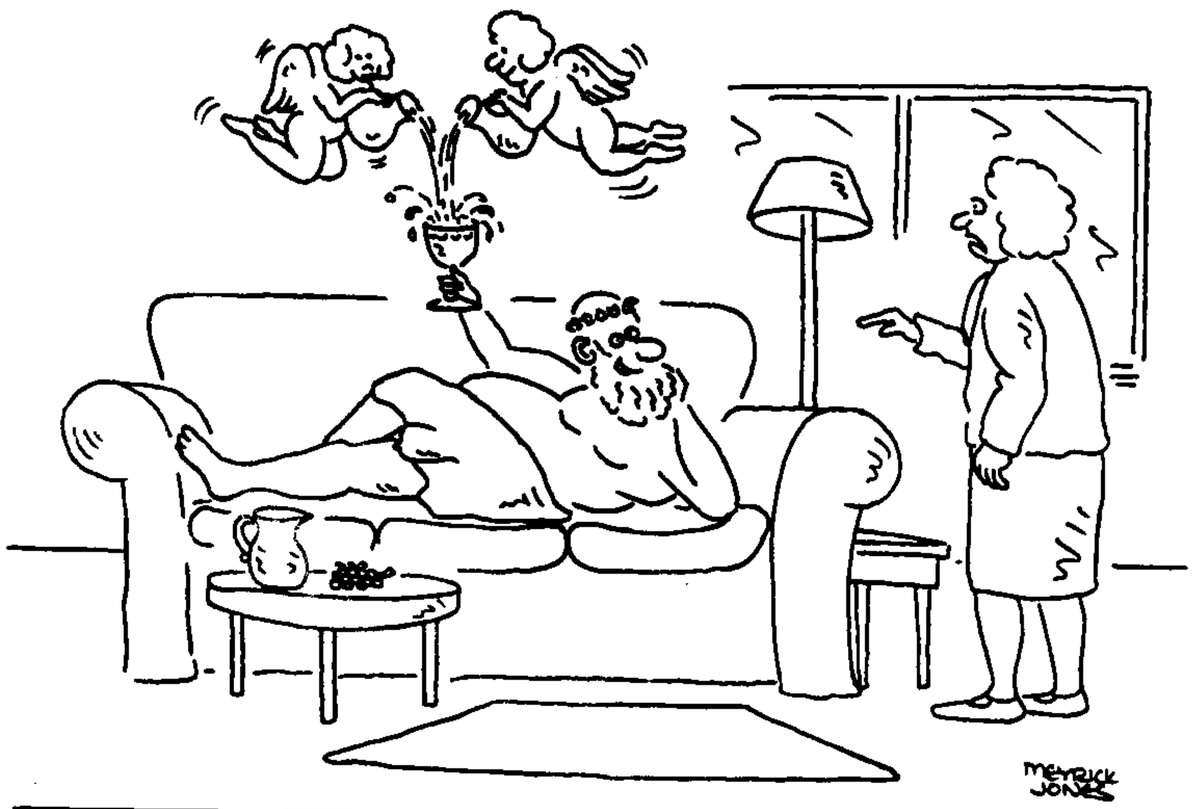
HIS smile lights up the room and he is clearly impressed by my 11 'O' Levels (including General Studies), 3 'A' Levels, 2:1 in Art, History and Anthropology and journalistic experience dating back to my time as chief sub-editor on *Snog* magazine.

Ever the gentleman, Coleridge neatly places my CV in the bin, adjusting the exquisite cuffs on his Turnbull & Asser shirt as he does so.

"It's been marvellous meeting you," he says, "but I've got another twenty interviews to do this morning, so if we're all finished..."

"Just one last question," I tell him, ambushing him as he shows me the door. "When do I start?"

© *All journalists in all newspapers*



"It's become more than just the occasional glass of wine, hasn't it?"

WORLD CUP RUGBY

SIX TO WATCH

Diertie Baastaad, legendary No. 17 of the South African All Whites. At 22 stone, Baastaad is bound to leave his mark on the opposition's face.

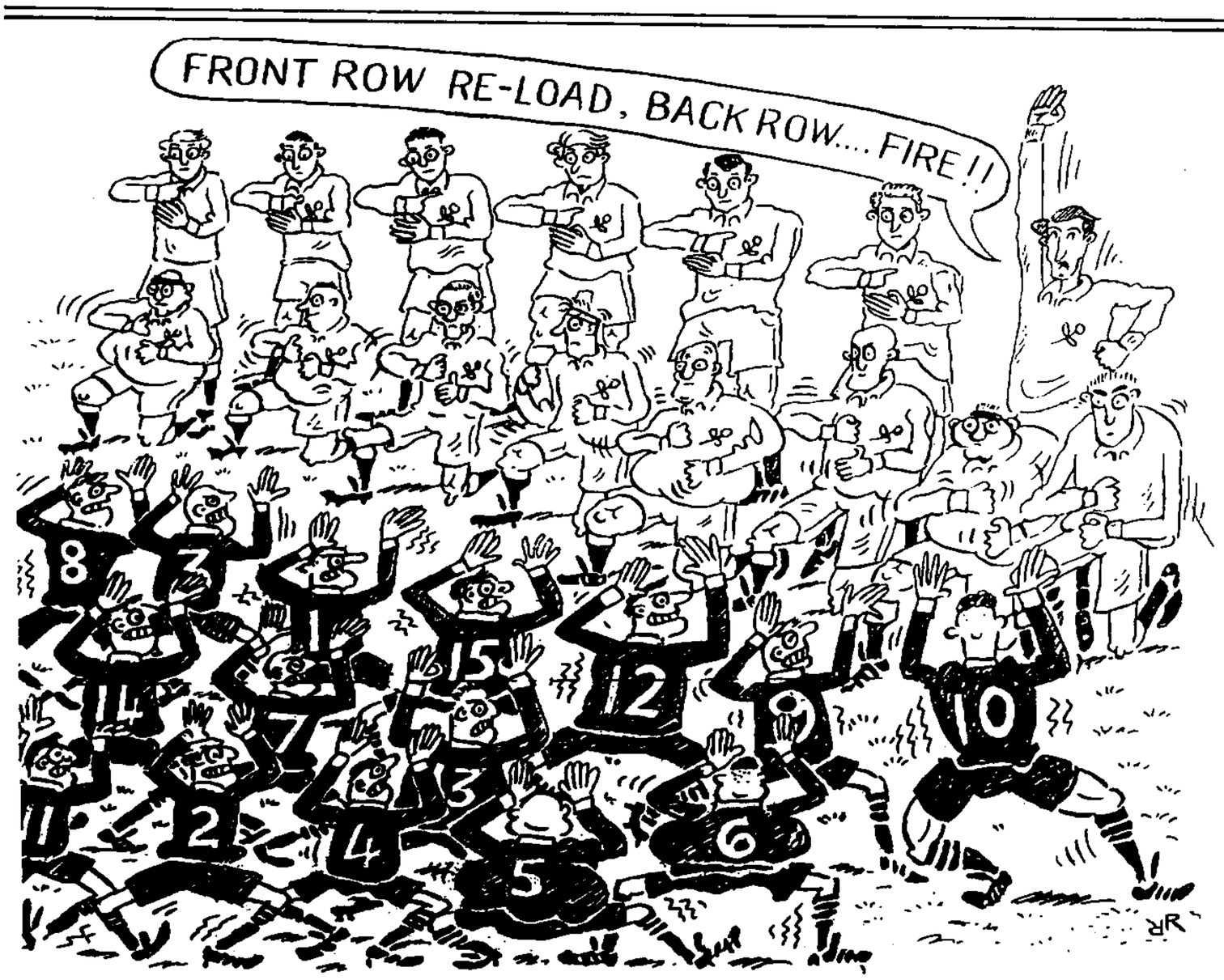
Puncho Gauja, legendary Argentinian hooker who, at 44 stone, has caught the eye of a lot of his opponents with his fingers.

Hujabugga Bollabreaka, legendary 33-stone Samoan full back famed for his kicking ability. Once converted the opposing scrum half from his own 20-yard line.

Jonah Whale, legendary 59-ton New Zealand giant mammal famed for his ability to swallow the entire England team whole.

Kanga Roo, legendary 7ft 9ins Australian line-out specialist, willing to take the fight to the other side, usually with his trademark boxing gloves.

Garry Du Lally, legendary English 24 milligram cocaine expert famous for denying ever scoring anything *(That's enough Rugby. Ed.)*



The English Team Perform Their Own Ancestral War Dance In Response To The Haka

MARCH OF THE APPRENTICE PAPERBOY

TURD LYRIC IS NATION'S FAVOURITE

by Our Poetry Correspondent
Griff Rhys-Mogg

A NINETEEN-Seventies hit single penned by the late Spiggy Topes, formerly of the popular singing group "The Turds", has been voted the nation's most-loved song lyric in a poll conducted by the BBC.

Imagine There's No John Lennon

The song, *Love Is The Thing*, an anthem for a whole generation, easily defeated all-comers with its poignant blend of idealism, contemplative wisdom and commercial cynicism.

Love Is The Thing (1970)
(Lyrics by S. Topes)

Lay down your arms.
Throw them in the air.
Love is the thing.
Hate isn't.

Oh yes, it is.
Oh no, it isn't.
It's up to you.
Or maybe not.

Will this do?

PS. Has anyone got a tune to fit this? S.T.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Letters to the Editor

Gays In The Services

SIR — I fail to see what all the fuss is about. In my day, it was well known that many officers, not to say other ranks, were what we used to call "Billy Bothways". Their identities and proclivities were an open secret, and what they got up to in the privacy of their own latrines was entirely their own business. However, when it came to the field of battle, these chaps proved that they were every bit as brave as the average red-blooded Tommy Atkins.

BRIG. J.F.Q. FARQUHARSON-GUSSETT,
Tatchell St Peter, Beds

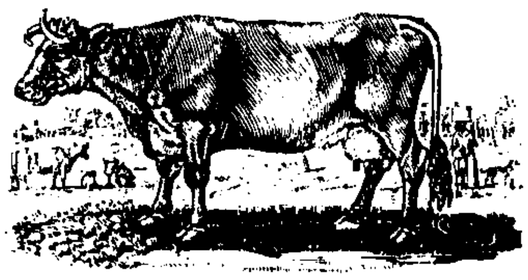
SIR — Those of us who are familiar with Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War will recall that, at the Battle of Homophobia in 426 BC, the Spartans relied for their victory on a regiment of highly-trained homosexuals, known as the *sodomitides*. Although only 40 strong, they defeated an Athenian army of 40,000 men, thus earning themselves immortality.

PROF. SHIRLEY BASSEY
The Judy Garland Chair of Classical Studies,
University of Soho
(formerly Doc Johnson's Love Shop)

WAR FRENCH TRADE WAR IN FULL

FRENCH BOYCOTT

200,000 Tonnes of British Beef



Value: £4,000,000

NICK BROWN BOYCOTT

2 Bottles of that nice Beaujolais they sell in Sainsbury's

One pain au chocolat from that lovely little patisserie near Jeremy's house

One baguette I was going to get for Sebastian's picnic...

Oh yes, and the Camembert that Phillip likes as well.

Value: £6.24

YES! IT'S OFFICIAL TORY MAYORAL CANDIDATE RHYMING SLANG!

CONFERENCE SPECIAL

OUTRAGE AS LABOUR LEADER ATTACKS CONSERVATIVES

Tories were appalled last night at what they called "a disgraceful display of disloyalty" when the Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, openly criticised the Conservative Party

(cont. p.94)

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Noel Johnson, alias Dick Barton Special Agent

So. Farewell
Then
Noel Johnson.

Alias Dick Barton
Special Agent.

Although I am
Too young to
Remember you
Personally,

Keith's Mum
Has vivid
Memories of you and
Jock and Snowy.

She can even
Hum the signature
Tune.

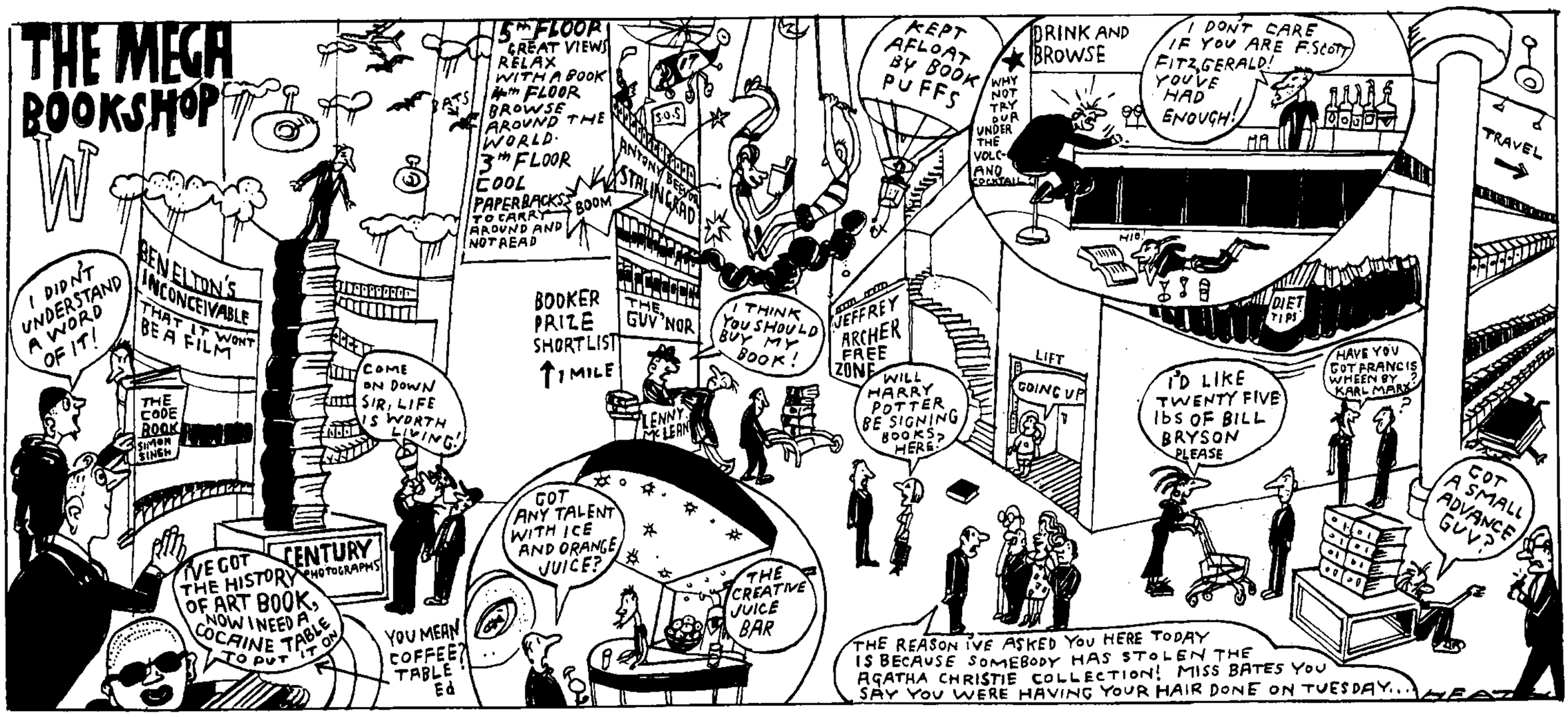
Dum-ti-ti-dum
Titi-dum-diti
Da da da.

Or something like
That.

It was all
A long time
Ago.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW


THE MEGA BOOKSHOP
5TH FLOOR GREAT VIEWS RELAX WITH A BOOK
4TH FLOOR BROWSE AROUND THE WORLD
3RD FLOOR COOL PAPERBACKS TO CARRY AROUND AND NOT READ
BOOM
S.O.S
ANTONY BEEVOR STALINGRAD
BEN ELTON'S INCONCEIVABLE THAT IT WONT BE A FILM
I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND A WORD OF IT!
THE CODE BOOK SIMON SINGH
CENTURY PHOTOGRAPHS
I'VE GOT THE HISTORY OF ART BOOK, NOW I NEED A COCAINE TABLE TO PUT IT ON
COME ON DOWN SIR, LIFE IS WORTH LIVING!
YOU MEAN COFFEE TABLE? Ed
BOOKER PRIZE SHORTLIST
1 MILE
THE GUV'NOR
LENNY McLEAN
I THINK YOU SHOULD BUY MY BOOK!
GOT ANY TALENT WITH ICE AND ORANGE JUICE?
THE CREATIVE JUICE BAR
KEPT AFLOAT BY BOOK PUFFS
WHY NOT TRY OUR UNDER THE VOLC-ANO COCKTAIL
DRINK AND BROWSE
I DON'T CARE IF YOU ARE F.SCOTT FITZGERALD! YOU'VE HAD ENOUGH!
HIS
DIET TIPS
TRAVEL
JEFFREY ARCHER FREE ZONE
WILL HARRY POTTER BE SIGNING BOOKS? HERE.
LIFT
GOING UP
I'D LIKE TWENTY FIVE lbs OF BILL BRYSON PLEASE
HAVE YOU GOT FRANCIS WHEEN BY KARL MARX?
GOT A SMALL ADVANCE GUV?
THE REASON I'VE ASKED YOU HERE TODAY IS BECAUSE SOMEBODY HAS STOLEN THE AGATHA CHRISTIE COLLECTION! MISS BATES YOU SAY YOU WERE HAVING YOUR HAIR DONE ON TUESDAY...

GOVERNMENT PLEDGES TO SHUT STABLE DOOR – 'WHATEVER THE COST'

by Our Rail Transport Staff

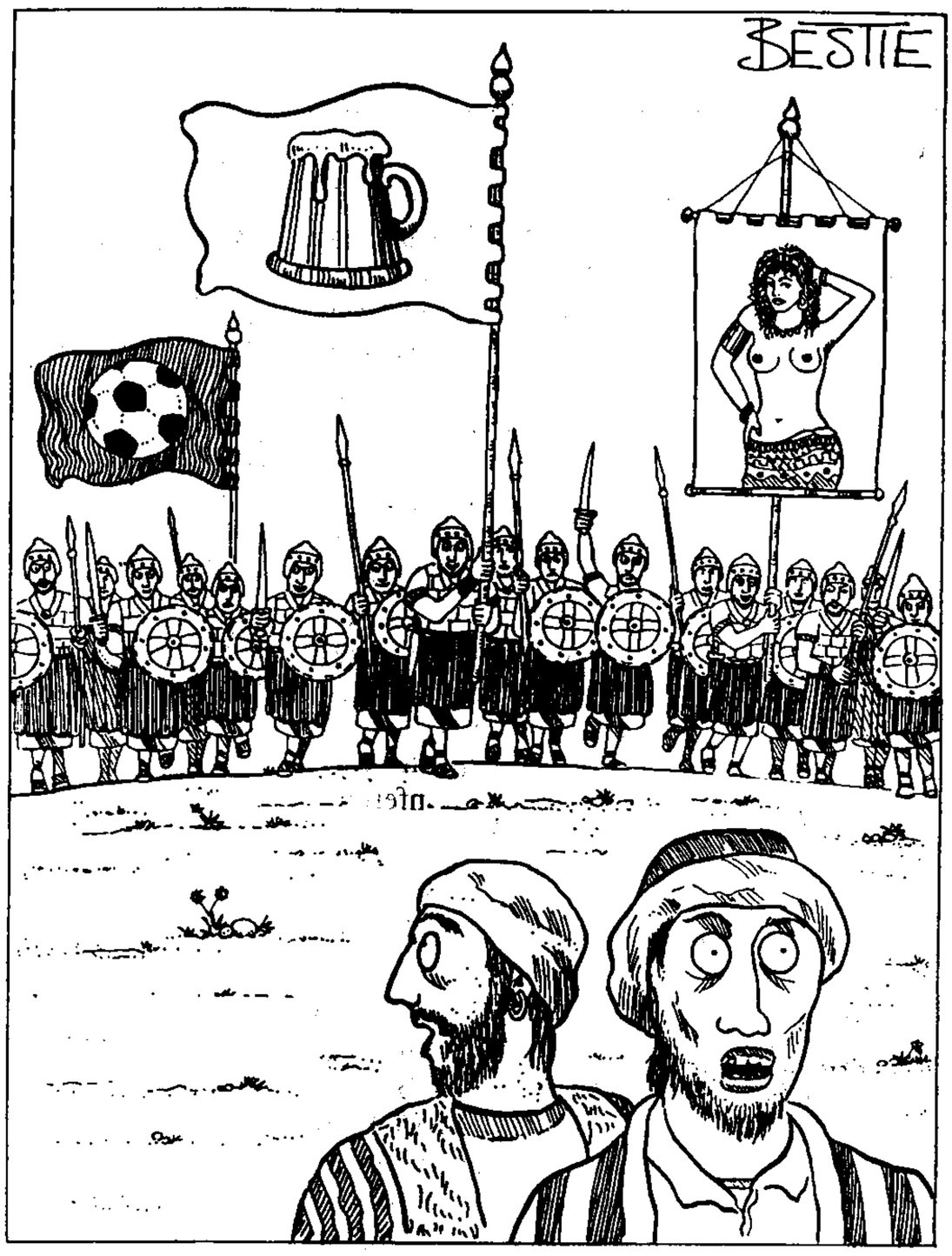
JOHN PRESCOTT today gave a firm undertaking to spend as much money as was necessary to close the stable door after the recent "bolting" incident.

"The stable door must be shut," he told reporters. "And I have launched an immediate initiative to get it closed as soon as possible."

He continued, "This government is absolutely committed to ensuring that the stable door incident is never repeated, even if it costs as much money as they told us it would five years ago before the horse bolted."

On Other Pages

■ Shocking number of pounds tragically lost as safety devices implemented **7**



"Run – it's the Philistines!"

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

BLAIR	THATCHER
Blair says	**Thatcher says**
All the known evils in the world come from Conservatism.	**All the known evils in the world come from Europe.**
Conservatism must be destroyed wherever it is to be found.	**Socialism (ie, Europe) must be destroyed wherever it is to be found.**
Anyone who disagrees with me on anything is a Conservative.	**Anyone who disagrees with me on anything is a Socialist.**
Such people must be exterminated.	**Such people must be exterminated.**
I am the Supreme Ruler of the Universe.	**I am the Supreme Ruler of the Universe.**
I shall be in power for 1000 years.	**I should have been in power for 1000 years if it hadn't been for that ghastly little creep Major.**

Mirror

Top Political Analysis From The Mirror's Award-Winning Commentator PAUL ROUTLEDGE

The Implications of the Conservative Party Conference

William Hague – what a baldy! Wee Willie Baldy! Nerdy weedy Willie baldy twit! Twitty wee Willie baldy nerd! Isn't Tony Blair marvellous?

© Alastair Campbell

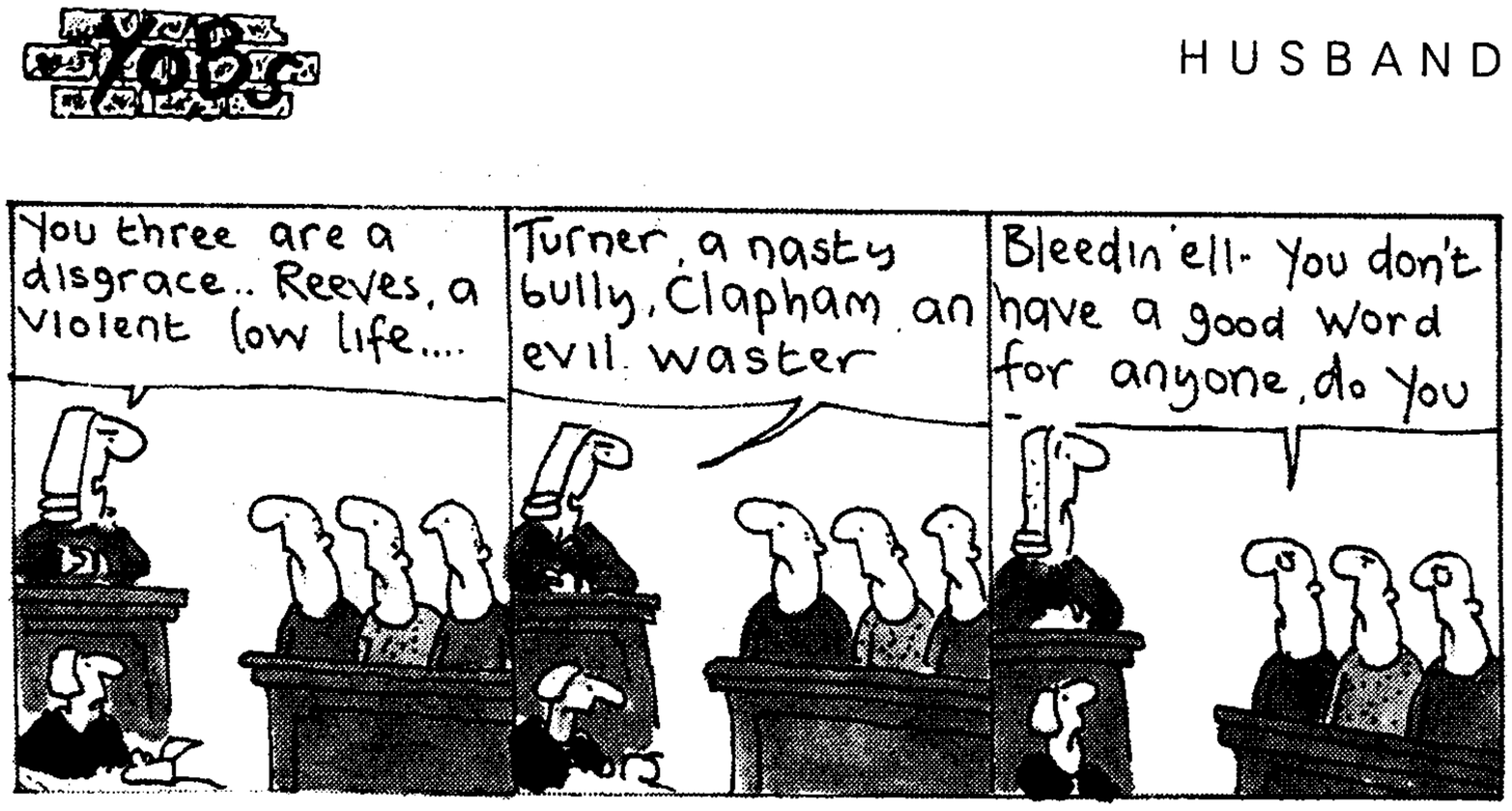
THE Sun

Top Political Analysis From The Sun's Award-Winning Commentator TREVOR KAVANAGH

The Implications of the Conservative Party Conference

William Hague – what a hero! Big Bill! Hunky Hague! Tory Tough Guy! The Testosterone Titan! The common-sense collossus! Isn't the Euro terrible?

© Rupert Murdoch


HUSBAND
You three are a disgrace.. Reeves, a violent low life....
Turner, a nasty bully, Clapham an evil waster
Bleedin'ell- You don't have a good word for anyone, do you

TV Highlights

Channel Four

The Bore War: 1999-2001

With the aid of contemporary archive footage, this award-winning documentary series reconstructs the desperate fight of the Bores to avoid extinction against the overwhelming forces of the Blairish Empire. Clinging to their archaic beliefs and way of life under their uncharismatic leader Willem Van Der Hague, they fought a series of rearguard actions, as the Blairish occupied all their traditional ground. Highlights include the Relief of Ladythatch, the Fall of Majorking and the Battle of Not Much Kop, where the Bores were finally wiped out. **Narrated by TV's Charles Bore.**

DIARY

If you'll just let me finish. How is William doing? Superbly! Quite superbly! He's proving an *excellent* caretaker, absolutely *first rate*. Frankly, anyone who believes I have ever said otherwise needs their head examining. William Hague! William Hague! Remember that name! Because no one else can! William Hague! Odd little chap. But believe me, he's a *truly formidable* presence, just so long as there's no one else in the room. William Hague! He may not be everybody's cup of tea. Some call him a little twerp, while his supporters argue that he is a nonentity. Well, this is a democracy, we must respect both sides. But he's quick learner and to my mind he's proved *absolutely first class* at every task I've set him, whether it's opening my car door, or ushering me into the conference hall. Full marks to the little fellow!

And once again William proved himself a *staunch ally* last week at my conference in Blackpool. Unlike his predecessor, he strikes me as a young man who's willing to pull up his socks and *learn*. "You know what they do in France, William?" I said to him as he took my coat for me, "They *eat snails*! Remember that!" His eyes darted up and down, so I knew he was taking it all in. I have the utmost faith that in twenty, maybe thirty years' time he will prove a doughty senior backbencher, full of backbone and character.

But first he must remember one or two tips I have been good enough to give him. Before he was due to speak at my conference last week, I took him to one side, removed my handkerchief from my handbag, placed it over my right forefinger, and said "*Lick!*" William dutifully licked – despite what his critics say, his obedience to me has never been in question – and with two or three swift and determined wipes I managed to clean a stubborn egg-stain off his chin.

"Always remember, William – a spotless chin is *half the battle won!*" I told him. And, believe me, it's a lesson he will not lightly forget. Incidentally, I wonder if anyone in his team is teaching him joined-up handwriting? He's young and inexperienced, but frankly I can see no reason at all why he shouldn't learn.

LADY THATCHER

Have you noticed how the birds don't twitter in the trees as they used to? When *we* were in Downing Street, they sang their hearts out for Great Britain. But all that disappeared under the subsequent administration. The birds have no real belief in their country any more. It's all Europe this, Europe that. Little do they realise that in Italy and Spain, they would *bite their heads off and eat them with garlic*.

Can you believe it? People are now *complaining* that our *staunch ally* Senator Pinochet was a torturer! For pity's sake, what's wrong with an honest-to-goodness bit of torture? Do you really mean to inform me that we as a nation have *really* grown so *lily-livered* that we have lost the stomach for a *highly professional* display of *first-class* torture?

Are they *really saying* that a staunch friend and ally of this country must forfeit his absolute right to remove his opponent's fingernails – *grubby fingernails, by all accounts* – with a decent, hard-wearing pair of British-made pliers?! Never did I think to see the honour of Britain so demeaned! This, my friends, is the Nanny State gone stark, staring *mad*!

And let me add this, if I may. When I was *single-handedly* recapturing the Falkland Islands, Senator Pinochet stood by me, just as Winston had stood by me throughout the course of the Second World War. Between the two of us, the Senator and I fought shoulder to shoulder at Goose Green before marching proudly into Port Stanley.

If you'll just let me finish. Senator Pinochet is a loyal friend to this country. A formidable opponent of the single European currency. And a *doughty upholder* of the rights of the police to do whatever they can when confronted by a human rights campaigner armed with two legs and an unclenched fist. Through sheer dint of character, he fought to save his country from the treacherous slide into democracy.

A Conservative leadership election is long overdue. Might I suggest it be extended to *all* those resident in this great country of mine? I need hardly add that I shall remain loyal to the present leadership, up to and until that time when it moves aside for a man of *proven military distinction* infinitely better qualified to shoulder the burden of that great office.

To luncheon with William and his equally unremarkable wife Ffion. What did I think of them? A *superb* couple, absolutely *superb*. Anyone who knows me knows that I would never call them *unremarkable*.

Unremarkable is not a word I use.

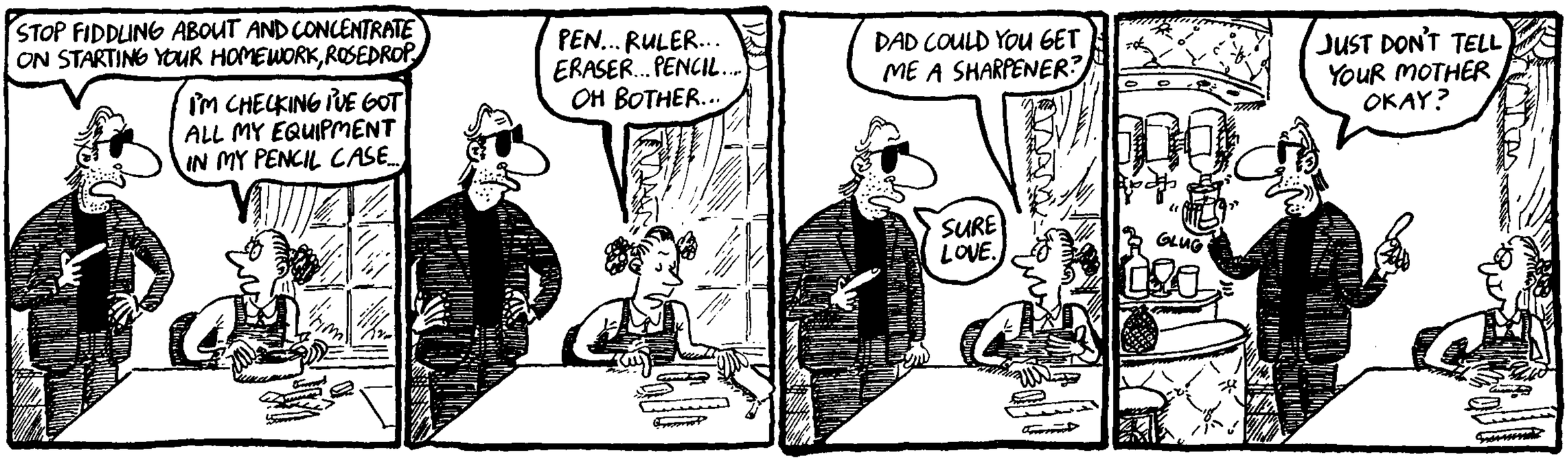
Sadly, Ffion struck me as unremarkable. Ffion! That's not a way I myself would have chosen to spell it.

"You should do something about that hair," I advised her, taking her to one side over a small glass of Scotch. "You don't want it like that! It's far too thin to wear that long! *You must get it cut*, my dear!"

After another small Scotch, I saw it as my duty to reach into my bag and pull out a decent pair of *strong British-made household scissors*, just right for the job in hand. Only last week, I used them to improve the Ancrams' curtains before setting sail on the unnecessary tassels on their cushions. "Stand still!" I told Ffion, "I'll see to it!" But the silly girl darted off to the other corner of the room. *Frit!* The girl was frit! So after another small Scotch I chased after her, scissors snapping in readiness.

"Anything the matter, Margaret?" It was William, standing in my way. "Out of the way, little fellow! I have a *job to do*!" I advised, drinking another small Scotch. Why *on earth* do one's junior ministers never let one finish the *job in hand*? Isn't it high time the little fellow realised that after twenty *very enjoyable years* as Prime Minister, I know what *needs to be done* with a pair of scissors?

If you'll just *let me finish*.


STOP FIDDLING ABOUT AND CONCENTRATE ON STARTING YOUR HOMEWORK, ROSEDROP
I'M CHECKING I'VE GOT ALL MY EQUIPMENT IN MY PENCIL CASE...
PEN... RULER... ERASER... PENCIL... OH BOTHER...
DAD COULD YOU GET ME A SHARPENER?
SURE LOVE.
GLUG
JUST DON'T TELL YOUR MOTHER OKAY?

Literary Review

Lepracorn

'Tis: A Memoir
Frank McCourt
(HarperCollins, £17.99)

Bejaysus, I'm standing on the bow of the boat now, saying goodbye to the auld country, with the white clouds sailing above my lice-infested head, thinking, My God, what's a poor lad from Limerick (dirty auld town that it is) to do here in the big wide world, with his auld mother depending on him, not to mention the thirteen spalpeens that the Christian Brothers wouldn't eddicate nohow, and any priest that gives him houseroom set on interfering with him, and...

Actually I am making this up. But only just. Despite some decidedly mixed reviews, the Frank McCourt poteen wagon trundles on: *Angela's Ashes*, the first volume of these garrulous memoirs, now in its umpteenth edition; *'Tis*, the sequel, straight in at the top of the bestseller list with a rumoured 270,000 copies in print.

Scoffers beware: Angela copped a Pulitzer, prompting a raft of Hibernian refugees to set pen to paper in rapt homage to their days on the old farm in Sligo, with Kitty McGarrigle giving them the eye — make that *oi* — over a cosy plate of pigs fry and cabbage. Even Frank's brother Malachy has chipped in. Having languished in primeval torpor for the best part of a millennium, Limerick, Galway and Ballyshannon are suddenly the trendiest joints on the literary block.

Some context. English publishing discovered Ireland about 170 years ago. Charmed by the picturesque scenery, pre-Victorian guidebook compilers such as Crofton Coker and Barrow were also enraptured by the likely looking figure of the "Irishman", the game lad with his knowing grin and his equally picturesque locutions who stepped forward to carry their luggage.

Come the mid-century Patrick, Barney or Seamus — together with the Blarney Stone, My Irish Mother, shillelaghs and all the rest of it — was a feature of every book of Hibernian travels on the shelf. Curiously enough, this process was collusive. The guide book brigade came looking for local colour. The wily locals, for their part, made sure that they found it. Never mind the patronising English bent on taking the piss out of the Emerald Isle, there's a strong case for maintaining that the stage Oirishman created himself.

Now, does any of this sound familiar? *'Tis*, it scarcely needs saying, and from the title down, has the lot. Beginning in 1949, with our teenaged hero *en voyage* to the New World, it rattles through every Irish obsession you care to name: mothers, pints, priests, poverty, sin — they're all there beaming in the foyer. Deposited in New York with not much than the clothes he stands up in, pus dripping from his inflamed eyelids, young Frank takes off on a whistlestop tour of post-war Hibernian America: drudging in a hotel; military service in Europe; a job in a warehouse leading to a slow ascent up the socio-intellectual ladder, admission to New York University, and the prospect of the good life, with marriage (it doesn't work out) fatherhood and his mother's death thrown in for good measure.

Much of this, it has to be said, is thoroughly engrossing, even allowing for Mr McCourt's considerable discursiveness. What periodically lays it low, inevitably, is the blarney, a kind of dusting of terminal Oirishry that gleams from every surface. Rogueish patter, startlingly unoriginal proverbs learned at mammy's knee, autodidact bartenders commanding you to read Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* — the whole thing twinkles like a Christmas Tree. Which would be just fine but for the inability of the chosen style to cope with the really serious stuff that sometimes elbows aside all the native self-consciousness.

This, after all, is a man who came from a West of Ireland slum, who spent time in Dachau, who went back home to marvel at the social inequalities that remained: "I don't know what's the use of coming back to Limerick," he reflects at one point, "where children are still running around in bare feet and looking at the world through scabby eyes, where my brother, Michael, has to wash dishes and my mother takes her time moving to a decent house." Nicely put, but the sense of the greasepaint suddenly falling off to reveal the real face beneath is a bit too strong for comfort.

Frank McCourt someone who has devised what seems to him an appropriate vehicle for dealing with the world, irrespective of its suitability for the material to hand, and will carry on doing it for as long as his publishers and the paying public let him. All of which will doubtless make him and messrs HarperCollins a great deal of money, but doesn't, alas, disguise some of the aesthetic fractures that gape from his books like, well, Barney the Leprechaun's pixie smile.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS Pt 94...

Diana Mosley: A Biography
Jan Dalley
(Faber, £20)

SEQUESTERED in their agreeable country house at Asthall, the sparkling Mitford sisters amused themselves by inventing nicknames for each other. It says something for the various factions and shifting allegiances that each person had several. Diana, for example, was known as Honks, Bonks or Bonkers, later as TDOF (The Disgusting Old Fascist), TSM (The Stormtroopers' Moll) or SOMBOTS (Sir Oswald Mosley's Bit On The Side)... A letter from her younger sister Unity, addressed from Berlin late in 1938, perhaps conveys something of the tenor of these times:

Darling Honks, oh Honks, what heaven it is here, just too divine really. The tea party was simply the last word, what with the Fuhrer's Charlie Chaplin imitation and Himmler pretending he had eaten all the cream cakes. Oh, and those darling little swastikas the children wave in the street, I felt I simply must have some to hang in the nursery! You simply must, oh Honks, come and stay in the little flat the Fuhrer has fixed me up with — the sweetest place, really, I think it used to belong to some of those ghastly Jew people, and Goering ready to take us to the opera *whenever we like.*

Love to Farve and Muv
Yours for the thousand
year Reich
Bobo

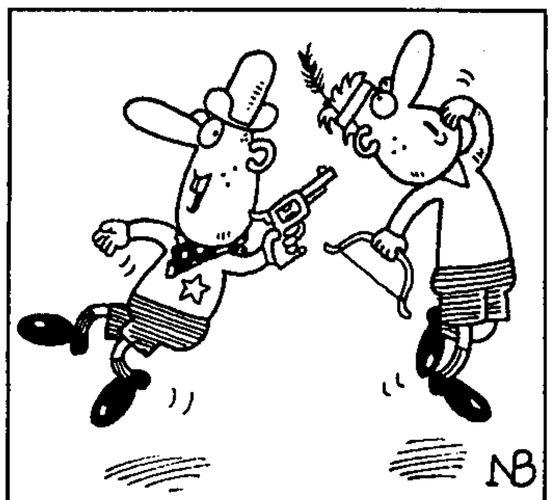
Locked into her tempestuous relationship with Mosley, Diana soon found the Establishment she had once courted to be unforgiving... Duke of Windsor... Blackshirts in the East End... Holloway Prison... My friend Goebbels... Striking bone structure... Agreeable house in Paris... Unapologetic to the end... Ghastly old valkyrie *(cont. p94).*

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ HAVING already trousered a large advance for his forthcoming unauthorised biography of Richard Branson, investigative hack Tom Bower has enriched himself still further by winning a bet with one of Branson's lieutenants.

Six months ago, when Branson revealed that he would seek an American flotation for his airline in October, Bower told a Virgin executive that it wouldn't happen. "It's the old Maxwell trick of announcing a flotation and then not doing it," he observed. "He wouldn't dare float it – not with the airline's finances in their present state." The Virgin man loyally insisted that Richard was a man of his word, and duly accepted the wager.

Lo and behold: last week Branson decided to postpone the flotation indefinitely.



"Come on, let's develop our social motor and cognitive skills through role play!"

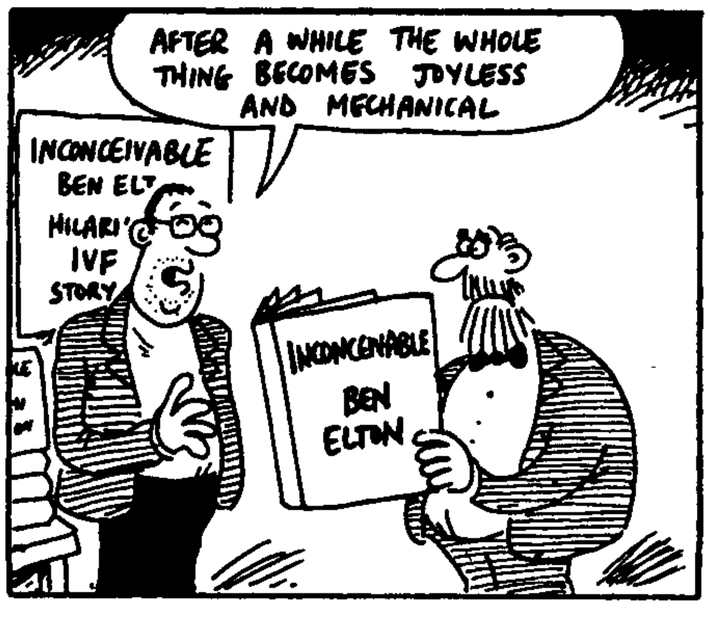
■ BAD NEWS for novelist Joseph O'Connor, actor Gabriel Byrne, historian Tim Pat Coogan and many others. The Irish-American company which publishes their works appears to be leaving the Emerald Isle.

The Dublin offices of Roberts Rhinehart are mysteriously deserted, prompting speculation that the company has decided to get its assets out of the way of the many imminent court cases arising from Sean McPhilemy's book *The Committee* (see *Eyes* passim).

The company's sudden flit will come as a particular shock to Gerry Adams. The peace-loving statesman has had five books published by Roberts Rhinehart, and generously donated the (negligible) royalties from the first four to Sinn Fein. Earlier this year, however, he took the revolutionary decision to accept the projected six-figure proceeds from his latest tome (a collection of magazine articles), and applied for exemption under the Irish government's tax-free scheme for certified artists.

Unfortunately the philistines in charge of Dublin's revenue commissioners questioned Adams's credentials as a literary master, and also pointed out that his desire to go into tax exile in the republic conflicted slightly with his status as MP for Belfast West.

'Bookworm'



THE BOOK, THE FILM, THE INTERVIEWS – WE KNOW HOW YOU FEEL!
INCONCEIVABLE BEN ELTON'S HILARIOUS IVF STORY
INCONCEIVABLE BEN ELTON

IN THE BACK

POLICE-S

Dai Hard

WHY should officers from South Wales police pull up a woman in her car for driving without wearing a seatbelt and then — knowing she suffers from Parkinson's disease — make her get out while they root through her shopping, demanding to see receipts?

Could it be for the same reason they pulled up her son on three separate occasions last Christmas, demanding that he produce his driving documents at a police station and breathalysing him?

Could there be any connection to three calls to their house in the early hours in response to a police station-linked panic alarm, when the family had not pressed the alarm? And could it in any way be connected to the fact that both mother and son, Carole and Marcus Walters, had lodged serious complaints against other South Wales police officers?

The complaints arose from a nasty racist incident in Cardiff city centre in August 1997. Marcus, then 18, his sister Emma, five, and friend Francisco Borg, 17, were viciously attacked by a gang of racists, one of whom set his pit-bull terrier into the back of the car where Emma was sitting.

Marcus managed to get his little sister out of the car and thrust her into the arms of a complete stranger for safekeeping while he and Francisco tried to flee their attackers and go for help. They flagged down a passing police car. But instead of being protected by officers they were themselves arrested. Francisco was sprayed in the face with CS gas. They were detained and both charged with violent disorder, while Marcus was also accused of assault on police.

Only one of the five white assailants was arrested at the scene even though they had been heard shouting racist abuse and seen smashing in the car windows to get at Marcus and Francisco. Amazingly one had even helped police arrest Francisco.

And how do we know all this? Some of the key action was caught on closed circuit video cameras giving the lie to the police case. Some of the officers' statements were also contradicted by each other and the video. For example, one officer had said Marcus hit him. In fact the officer is seen being hit by one of the racists.

But for the video Marcus and Francisco might have ended in jail with a criminal record. After the judge had viewed it at the start of their trial, he called in the prosecution lawyers who dropped all charges. After pressure from Hilary Brown, of Butetown Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), two other white men were eventually arrested and charged. One was sentenced to 12 months jail, another to six and the third to 120 hours' community service for what the judge agreed was a racially motivated attack.

Not surprisingly Marcus, Francisco and Carole Walters, on behalf of her daughter Emma, lodged lengthy complaints against several police officers involved.

The investigation into South Wales police was carried out by, er, South Wales police, under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority (PCA). On 29 September the PCA announced that one PC is to face disciplinary charges of neglect of duty and discreditable conduct, while four others are to get a ticking off — an "admonishment" or "advice". The PCA press release gave no reason for the conclusions and failed to acknowledge that race played any part in the affair.

There was no mention that the attackers were all white and the victims black; and a PCA letter to the Walters accompanying the press release was no more forthcoming.

To Marcus and Francisco, their CAB adviser and the black rights group, the 1990 Trust, coming after the Macpherson report into the police investigation of the murder of Stephen Lawrence the PCA ruling was "insulting". They believed the officers should have been charged with criminal offences or sacked.

The two young victims had been arrested, handcuffed and thrown into the back of a police van. There the CS gas also contaminated Marcus, who described feeling "like I was drowning". They were held until the early hours of the next morning and for the next eight months lived with the threat of a criminal trial and conviction hanging over them. Since the trial, when Marcus's address was read out in court, the Walters have received race hate and death threat mail from the White Wolves and Combat 18 — to which one of the attackers belonged. Their letterbox has had to be sealed and a panic button link to the police station installed. Emma, now aged 8, remains traumatised.

The Walters have now lodged more complaints over the times they have since been stopped by police and Francisco is pursuing action over South Wales' handling of another assault upon him, by men believed to be associated with the racists. The family have not complained about the alarm calls — they were told their alarm was faulty, a new system was fitted and there have been no more night-time responses from the police.

South Wales police says it is conducting a full investigation into the complaints about Marcus being repeatedly stopped in his car. They believed the complaint about their treatment of Carole Walters had been withdrawn — she says not. According to the PCA, it cannot comment on its apparently lenient decision because of the forthcoming disciplinary hearing against the one PC, which will not take place for "some months". And there was no mention of the racial motivation behind the "series of incidents" simply because of space. "Everyone knew about it. There was no need," said a spokesman.

Despite all this Carole Walters still hopes to see justice done in public in the civil courts, where the families are seeking damages for wrongful arrest, false imprisonment, assault and malicious prosecution.

Knacker in Blunderland

MORE blunders by the police who failed to catch serial rapist Clive Barwell for 16 years have come to light.

Barwell was finally jailed for life last week after Britain's biggest inquiry since the similarly bungled hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper. His first attack, ironically, was in the heart of Ripperland, Bradford, in December 1982. It was on a 30-year-old woman who told police how a man had forced his way into her car and raped her. The inspector who dealt with the woman was one Brian Jackson — who was later sent to prison himself for indecently assaulting young girls.

In January 1983 Barwell raped a 26-year-old woman after abducting her from the car park of a Leeds hospital. He dumped her in a canal with a shopping bag tied over her head. She survived the attack. West Yorkshire police knew the rapist had used a stolen blue Ford Cortina before and after the abduction of the second victim. They knew, too, that someone had stolen such a car in Leeds and gone on a shopping spree with a credit card from that car. If the two incidents were linked, this would yield a harvest of clues: there might be a pattern to the use of the credit card which could indicate the home area of the rapist; possibly he had even used the card in a shop where his name was known.

The inquiry sent off for copies of all of the vouchers that had been used in the shopping spree — 20 of them. One of these vouchers proved there was indeed a link: it had been used to buy petrol for the stolen Ford Cortina driven in the second rape. The garage assistant had carefully written the Cortina's number on the back of the voucher. But the detective who checked the vouchers simply missed the clue and reported that there was no link between the stolen credit card and the rapist. The harvest of clues remained untouched. The officer responsible has since been promoted to superintendent.

In 1989 Barwell was sent to prison for 16 years for other offences. In 1993 he was allowed out several days a week on "resettlement licence", which allowed him to work as a manager at the Beresford Arms Hotel, in Ashbourne, Derbyshire — and continue his attacks on women. Barwell drew a salary of £10,400 a year, bought a car and, according to home office sources, was disciplined for parking in the governor's reserved space on one of his occasional visits back to the prison.

LAMBETH INQUIRY

Fostering abuse

THE widely reported findings of John Barrett's inquiry into Steven Forrest, a former deputy manager of Lambeth council's Angell Road children's home, who died of Aids having buggered children in his care (see *Eyes* 965 & 978), looks like yet another missed opportunity to tackle organised child abuse in the borough. Barrett's report states that blaming individuals involved in covering up Forrest's abuse is not the answer. Why not?

Over the last seven years there have been six inquiries into child abuse and other sexual misdemeanours by Lambeth staff. Each one has failed to stop further abuse happening as each incident has either been looked at in isolation or has simply not been addressed by those "investigating".

In 1995 Elizabeth Appleby QC led an inquiry whose remit included producing a written report on "any abuse within Lambeth" and to "make recommendations to prevent future abuse". Her report had few concrete recommendations to prevent further abuse and failed to mention details of abuse which some brave individuals had given her. When Inspector Knacker recently asked her to hand over her evidence they were astonished to be told that she had, er, not kept it.

In 1993 a Social Services Inspectorate report called for a radical overhaul of Lambeth's child protection procedures after finding that child abuse by staff could go undetected. Nothing happened. Later, in the same year, the then chair of social services Anna Tapsell told the director of social services, David Pope, to police-check all social services staff to ensure they had no undeclared criminal convictions for child abuse. Such checks were never done.

Something far more sinister happened in 1993. A housing worker, Bulic Forsythe, was given the near-impossible task of investigating senior housing staff involved in the filming and distribution of pornographic videos, which included paedophile material. Three days after Forsythe told a colleague he was afraid he would be "got at" and that he was going to "spill the beans", he was bludgeoned to death in his flat, which was then set alight. Witnesses spoke of seeing three well-dressed men leaving holding files. Needless to say, the papers relating to his investigation were never found. The murder remains unsolved.

Lambeth's response to Forsythe's death was to set up yet another inquiry, this time made up of three senior female officers. The most enlightening features of their report was the amount of pressure the three women were put under to sweep everything under the carpet.

If the multifarious inquiries have had one thing in common, other than their recommendations being ignored, it is that shortly after their publication staff leave the council, not because they face disciplinary action but because they are offered payoffs. Currently some social services staff are rubbing their hands in anticipation of the severance cheques they are currently negotiating. Once gone, they will be able to ignore requests to give information and explanations for their actions to Helen Kenwood, who is heading yet another inquiry; charged with tracing thousands of children who may have been abused whilst in Lambeth's "care".

About the only section to come out with any credit is the council's corporate anti-fraud team (CAFT). Following an exercise which CAFT undertook in June of this year, which examined whether social workers with responsibility for child care had been police-checked, it was found that fewer than half had been checked. Simply put, this means Lambeth has no idea if staff and foster carers currently employed to care for children are convicted abusers or not.

In the City

WHO is it that fugitive spiv Andrew Regan is threatening to expose if he is brought back to Britain to face charges over the £2m Co-Op "bung"? Clearly not the two accused "bungees". More likely are his ever so helpful advisers at merchant bankers Hambros, headed by longtime ally Peter Large.

The bombshell over the £2.4m payment into the Swiss account of offshore company Trellis International exploded as Regan was mounting his abortive £1bn bid to rape and pillage the sleepy Co-Operative Wholesale Society. It was set off by CWS's adviser Swiss Bank Corporation, which just happened to have been Regan's adviser at food group Hobson at the time of the payment for extending an all-important CWS supply contract.

SBC knew all about the 1995 payment to the man behind Trellis, Israeli investor Ronald Zimet. Strangely this information did not appear to have reached everyone at Hambros, even though Large, the former SBC corporate finance head, was now in charge of the CWS bid.

Indeed SBC knew Zimet — expected to testify against Regan and two former CWS executives Allan Green and David Chambers — very well. Zimet held a sizeable stake in Hobson via SBC's London nominee company. It is believed he bought these shares before the vital CWS supply contract was extended.

Zimet financed a company linked to Robert Bonnier, then at SBC to buy shares in Hobson ahead of the CWS deal. Bonnier and Zimet became co-directors and shareholders at Freepages, now Scoot.com. The Freepages deal, injected into a shell company called Blagg, was engineered by another SBC alumnus — Chris Akers. Akers is said by some to have helped introduce Regan to SBC. Both men worked under Peter Large.

Former SBC insiders claim that when news of the £2.4m payment emerged in 1995 concerns were expressed in the bank about its bona fides. The payment to an offshore company's Swiss bank account controlled by a Hobson shareholder for a few days' work in supposedly brokering the CWS extension decided in part by a known Regan associate was resonant with suspicions of corruption.

But such concerns were rejected, especially after the payment was cleared by the Hobson auditors and board. That is until the payment surfaced two years later along with the revelation that Regan had been supplied with internal CWS documents by one of those who helped extend the Hobson contract.

Just how much Peter Large and his colleagues at Hambros knew and approved of Zimet and his payment may be one of the embarrassing matters their former client may refer to — if and when he returns from his Monaco hideaway.

The decision to announce last week that an arrest warrant had been issued for Regan may have been influenced by tensions between the Serious Farce Office and Scotland Yard over the handling of the Regan case. As pointed out in the last *Eye*, the SFO had charged Green and Chambers, plus Hobson's lawyer, but strangely had neither charged Regan nor revealed the exact charges against the three men. This was part the SFO's policy of seeking to "invite" Regan to return to face the music. The hope was that by January, when Green et al were due in court, Regan would be persuaded to do the decent thing. Some hope given he had taken himself off to Monaco after the SFO investigation began!

This policy infuriated senior Yard detectives who saw it as doomed to failure and driven by a weak-willed SFO's desire to avoid an extended and expensive extradition battle by taking the easy option. Discussions with Regan's lawyers had proved fruitless.

The decision to issue the warrant with the expected next move to apply for Regan's extradition on theft charges from Monaco is seen as a triumph for the Yard's realistic hard line.

SHAREHOLDERS in Scotland's oldest public company, Titaghur, formerly Titaghur Jute, may have been excited by word that chairman Graham Avery intends to bring the company back to the stock market via an OFEX listing. But before they start celebrating they and those who purport to regulate the OFEX kerb market would do well to consider the background of their saviour.

Graham Avery has been running Titaghur since late 1997. He replaced another accident prone chairman — Reg Brealey of Sheffield United fame. Brearley had promised much but delivered zilch, as he had done at the football club and at the large Knoydart estate in the Highlands.

Brealey and Avery have something else in common. They are both known to former Facia founder Stephen Hinchliffe, currently awaiting trial next year on fraud and corruption charges. Avery's link with Hinchliffe goes back to 1989 and a property deal in Sheffield which went badly wrong. Avery was then chairman of WB Industries. He agreed to pay £1.7m for the office block. WB was unable to complete the deal which soon emerged to have been grossly overpriced. Avery was forced out of WB the following year. The company later revealed multi-million pound losses. A police investigation into Avery resulted in his arrest. He was never charged. No doubt the full details of Avery's time at WB Industries will be published in any OFEX listing documents.

MORE news on former stockbroker Hugh Eaves whose fellow partners at Phillips & Drew entrusted with their £20m pension fund only to see it disappear (*Eye* 984). Not only did Eaves generously endow Bury soccer club with up to £6m which may or may not have been his to invest, but he was also the backer of rugby league neighbours Swinton. Eaves first became an investor in the failing rugby club in 1993. By 1995 he had taken an 80 percent stake and had started to make vital loans to keep the loss-making club afloat. These have risen from £15,000 to possibly more than £400,000. How Eaves afforded such generosity and what his creditors can expect to recover remain matters for concern to his former partners who are unlikely Bury or Swinton fans.

THE judges are no doubt quickly joining those in the Establishment whom the phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed sees as being out to get him.

The law lords ruling that the Neil Hamilton libel show must go on next month is but the latest recent legal setback for Fayed. The suspicion is that senior legal circles consider it is time Fayed be forced — if possible — for the first time to answer questions in public and under oath instead of using the courts to hide behind his lawyers.

"Can we invoice a client for invoicing him, Mr Grabbit?"

Shortly before the Lords decision Fayed was ordered to answer questions about his knowledge of and role in the breaking into of the Harrods safe deposit box owned by his rival "Tiny" Rowland. Fayed's lawyers have spent months seeking to prevent him having to do so. As a result, almost a year after surrendering to judgment in the case for damages brought by Rowland's widow Josie Rowland and his estate, Fayed has still not been judged or paid any damages or costs.

Several weeks before the Rowland decision Fayed also lost a legal battle with former Harrods security chief Robert Loftus. A judge ruled Fayed was liable over the illegal "hacking" into Loftus' bank accounts and an adverse reference given to a potential Loftus employer. Fayed has already had to settle a libel action brought by Loftus.

All of which will do nothing for his British passport prospects. The question now is whether Fayed will confront Hamilton or leave the court to assess damages – an unenviable task.

THE role of those corporate Draculas, father and son Paul and Mark Levinson, in the demise of their latest victim, pop promoter Harvey Goldsmith, has yet to emerge but is certain to have been influential.

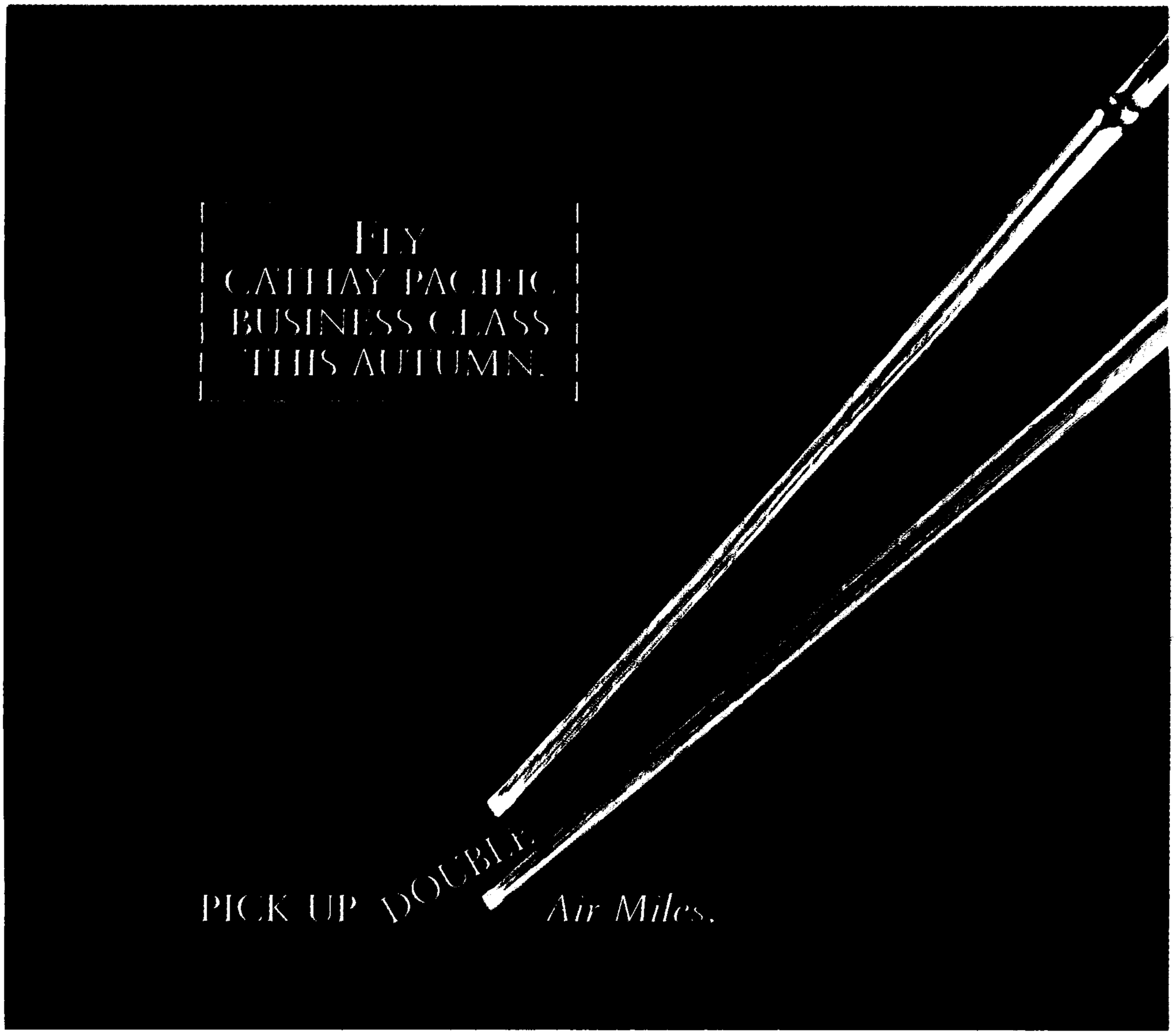
The Levinsons became shareholders in Harvey Goldsmith Entertainments two years ago as part of a deal whereby they injected £750,000 into the cash strapped business. They also took a floating charge and Mark Levinson became a director. In typical Levinson style they were to be paid back first plus £1m in the event of a liquidation unless all 1997 debts had been repaid.

Whether the money is there to pay with HGE in administration remains to be seen. The Levinsons hoped to expedite repayment by injecting HGE into Tring International, the cheap CD supplier also in their sphere of influence. When that deal collapsed late last year Goldsmith's days were probably numbered.

'Slicker'

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE



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specialEYEs

surveillance

DISCREET **SURVEILLANCE** EQUIPMENT
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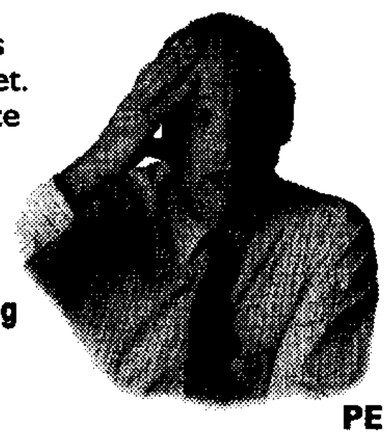

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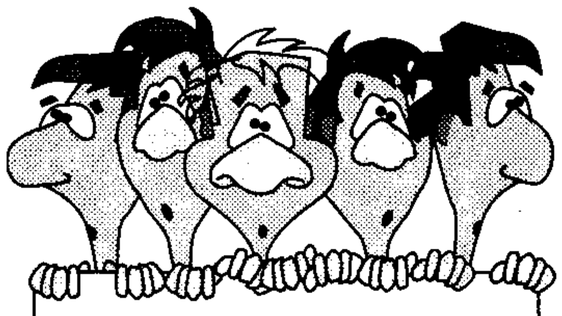

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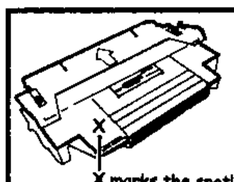

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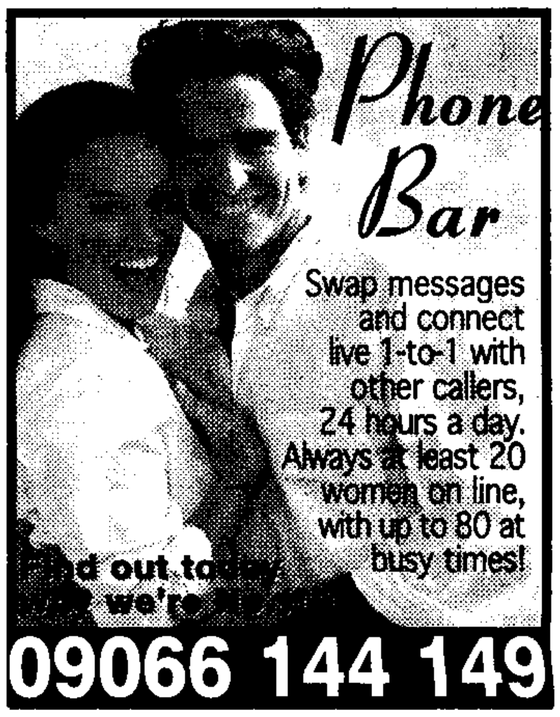
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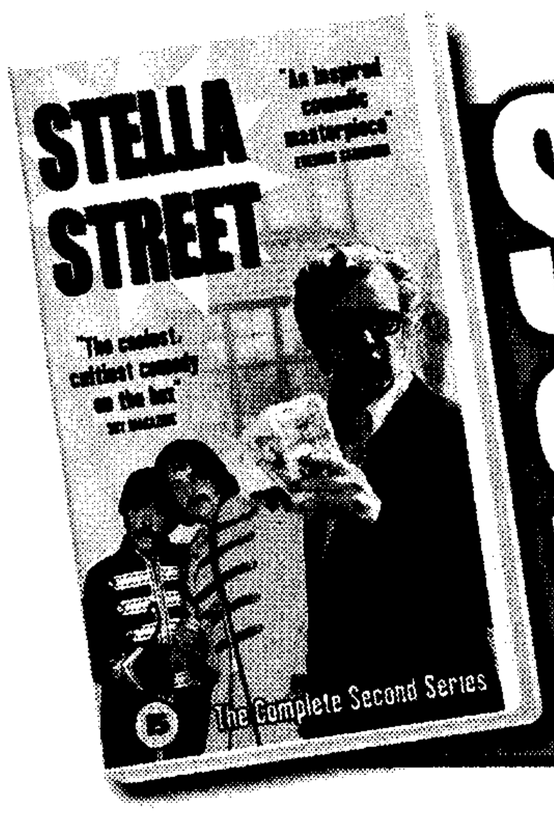

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WANTED: ANGEL for independent filmmaker. Call yourself an executive producer. Call 0171 218 4734 / 0181 933 4304.

LEAKY ROOF taken hardworking single mum's funds for son's dream trip to Lapland before Father Christmas magic is broken. Can only return thanks. Please help. NatWest 01 02 77, 25046802 or Box 3387.

FUNDS NEEDED for Sociological Experiment – HSBC sort-code 40-19-20, account 21862692.

HELP US SAVE the CORAL REEFS. Environmental group desperately needs assistance for ongoing projects. Full details at http://members.aol.com/toglovers. Account: 20.61.51, 80915580.

STROKE VICTIM requires £3500 for experimental brain cell transplant in America. Sainsbury 12-60-05, 07063530.

NEED £500 to pay off repaid loans – Thanks. FD 404779 20203181.

IMPOVERISHED WOMAN needs modest funds to complete History MA – Lloyds 30 94 74, 0121160. Box 1487.

FUNDING, BOAT, equipment to search for long necked seals around UK. 01268 769167.

FACE LIFT desperately needed. Please help in any way. Thanks. Box 1387.

UNBELIEVABLE BUT TRUE! 9/11/96 – Wife deserted me & two sons. Cleared all accounts (personal and business up to O/D limits) – plus falsified loans to get total £56K to set up home as pregnant by new lover. No money/stock, ran business at 30% but bank closed accounts 01/98. 10/3/98 – Voluntary Arrangement safeguarded boys, home and business. 1/10/98 – I won divorce, kept business, home, boys. Huge solicitors/accountants bills for IVA and divorce. Paying £1,000 monthly. 1/9/99 – Hospitalised acute ulcerated colon – stress running business, plus two part time jobs to fund repayments. Now court-house repossession possible through impatient solicitors/ building society/ accountants/ Inland Revenue and impossible repayment demands. Desperately needs funds – Interest free loan(s) preferred – no security/equity – only my word! Have paid £30k, have £30k left to pay, no working capital. Could afford to repay £500 pcm ongoing immediately. Deadline 1st November. Box 3087 or 40-43-35, A/c No 31219421.

DESPERATE NHS WORKER needs any amount. Thank you. 09 01 26 09997337.

PLEASE HELP. Depression, long-term unemployment. Donations welcome – HSBC 40-05-03, 71133411.

DESPERATE. Disabled mother and teenage daughter seek financial help to get own home. RBS 16-19-26, 10008646.

HUGE DEBTS forcing loving couple apart. Desperate. Please help. Natwest 51-61-06, 15377369. Thanks.

FINAL YEAR PhD Student. Nearing completion but £6500 study loan adversely affecting studies. Any help sincerely appreciated. Thank you. Barclays 20-89-16, 40603740.

ABSOLUTELY DESPERATE AFTER LONG ILLNESS.
Working hard,
debts no smaller – help.
Will do same as thanks, when able.
NatWest 51 50 14, 39454509
(previous account error).

BOLD YOUNG Theatre Group performing new play. Secured good London venue. Needs £3,425 funding – profitshare negotiable. Phone JONATHAN 0973-288602 else Barclays 20-29-90, 60134198. Thanks.

YOUNG STUDENT needs £3000 to fund voluntary placement with AFS – registered charity number – 284174. Box 2487.

YOUNG FEMALE STUDENT desperately needs donations, anything! Acknowledged. Yorkshire Bank 05-09-94, 25391414. Box 1887.

VERY DESPERATE. Trusted and loved husband. He left. HSBC 40-20-30, 51488767. Thank you so much.

HELP SAVE PIXIE from fate worse than death. Girobank 89-20-01, A/c No 65918101.

DEDICATED POSTGRADUATE student, forced to suspend studies to tend sick mother, desperately needs funds to complete PhD. Barclays 20-51-01, 20213586.

ABUSED MALE needs £10,000 to start new life. Midland 40-26-02, 51208098.

BURNING AMBITION to make money – can't be arsed. Bank details: 20-53-22, Account No. 70545708.

CONGENIAL, DILIGENT yet impoverished botanist urgently needs funding for Masters. Barclays 20-79-25, 90577472.

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YOUNG LADIES worldwide seek penpals, friends, lifemates. Free details, photos! HERMES, Box 610188/S, 10922 Berlin, Germany. Fax: 0049 30 25299775.

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EYE LOVE

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BLONDE NHS WORKER seeks bearded trade unionist for half intelligent conversation. Box 3787.

ATTRACTIVE WOMAN, 42, seeks truly intelligent, unattached gentleman, SOH, down-to-earth. Celt welcome. S/W London. Box 3587.

LONELY, ATTRACTIVE, prof male, 44 – caring, GSOH, fond of eating out, arts, countryside – seeks younger woman, 25-35, who would like to have relationship with mature man. Hants/Oxon. Box 3687.

IN NEED of a female accomplice? Then look no further. Box 1187.

BLONDE, DYNAMIC, media woman, 50, seeks younger, intelligent, single man (London S/E) for fun – maybe future. Box 3287.

LONELY WHITE European romeo, 35, seeks Indian, Asian, white European or Latin American female, age 18ish to 45ish – looks unimportant – for friendship/relationship. Telephone: John 0788 1926921. (Midlands). Box 3187.

UGLY, SHORT, FAT, effeminate, charmless & ignorant liar (45, N/S) seeks attractive, educated F. (35-45) for civilised diversions. Box 2987.

HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL young artist seeks unattached gorgeous older woman 45+ who will understand the pressures of a high flying career and offer empathy, luxury and intellectual conversation between the sheets. Box 2287.

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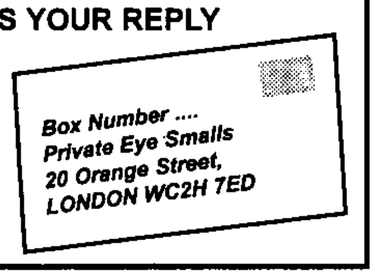

INTELLIGENT MAN, 5ft 9, very wealthy, single, great company, passable looks, late 40's – seeks wonderful lady for fun, company and lots of laughter. Must be kind hearted, romantic, love travelling, shopping, and pretty. Photo please – or if shy, great letter. Age 30-45. Box 2887.

SOULMATE REQUIRED by successful professional male, 37, with own business and nice sports car. Why is it so hard to find the right woman when I'm only looking for friendship? Manchester. Box 1686.

HANDSOME, ORCHID LOVING married man, 50s, seeks white woman, 16-30, for discreet liaison. Sunbury-on-Thames 784162.

BLACK MALE DOCTOR, 39, seeks funloving woman. Any nationality and aged 18 to 38. Box 0987.

CLASSY PROFESSIONAL Midlander, tall, blond, n/s, seeks smart, slim, attractive woman, 20-40, current status unimportant, for romance and laughter. E-mail: Papertiger372407@AOL,com

RESILIENT, SOLVENT, warm but unhappily tied professional man, 50yrs, 6'0" – not bad looking, dry sense of humour – seeks totally discreet relationship with similarly placed female, 32-42. Should be slim, devastatingly attractive, sophisticated and above all, sane. London area. Absolute confidentiality reciprocated. Photograph please. Box 2687.

TWO MALE GOLFING enthusiasts, in fifties, planning short gold autumn break at Lamanga, Spain – seeking pair discreet ladies for foursome on/off the course. Box 2587.

ASSERTIVE, HANDSOME entrepreneur, M/40 – seeks sleek, younger, unassertive, erotically inclined F/partner. 07050 398943.

THIS GENTLEMAN prefers Brunettes. London/Devon based professional WLTM late 20's early 30's like minded professional female. Likes laughter, exercise, nights out, good food and wine, the outdoors, black knee length boots. Dislikes arrogance – E-mail me: ever.hopeful@virgin.net.

TALL, THIN, STRONG, and worldly woman, 51, inventive, materially very successful, considered glamorous, looking for new partner to go for walks and have a laugh with. Unattached. You must know the difference between discreet and discrete, otherwise I'm opened minded. Box 2387.

INTELLIGENT, INDEPENDENT romantic and desirable lady early 40s, wants to be enraptured by an intellectual, ingenious, passionate and free-spirited gentleman who loves classical music. Box 0985.

BILLY BUNTER, 34, seeks Mrs Quelch. Teeside. Box 1987.

SINGLE, SPIRITED, stylish lady, 40s, seeks available communicative soulmate for great relationship. Thames Valley. Photo helpful. Box 1787.

BLUE-EYED, GENTLE, twinkly graduate, 35 – seeking slim, pretty, smiley woman. Photo appreciated. Box 1687.

PASSIONATE Edinburgh woman, 29, seeks tall, attractive soul mate to share pursuits and possibly more. Box 2187.

SENSUAL RUBENESQUE dark-skinned woman (30) seeks warm, affectionate, attractive, sensuous man for wild, romantic relationship. Box 0887.

KGB TEMPTRESS sought by attached comrade, ex- New Labour, disillusioned with President Blair. Available for lunchtime de-briefings. Let's talk treachery. SW1/WC1. Box 0387.

CEREBRAL SLUT sought by sensitive strapping, 6ft, 30 something looker. Photo guarantees reply. London/SE. Box 2087.

ATTRACTIVE, PROFESSIONAL male, (38), married but unfulfilled, seeks female free spirit for sensuous fun relationship. Any nationality. London. Box 0587.

PETER – TALL, SLIM, personable, a youthful 60, needs loving relationship with caring, loving lady who shares my love of the countryside, antiques and the simple pleasures. I'm friendly, humorous, passionate – and a non-snorer! Surrey, but mobile. Box 0787.

PROFESSIONAL ARTIST, 50, tall, dark hair, seeks beautiful model. Somerset. Box 0187.

TALL, WRY, INTELLIGENT, SUCCESSFUL
Londoner, 40,
seeks similar woman
who has kept her stripey tie.
A photo would be appreciated.
Box 1587.

GRADUATE, 27, seeks Mrs Robinson for erotic education and fun times. London. Box 1984.

SENSUAL MAN, 27, seeks sexy lady for intimate encounters. London/SE. Box 2084.

A GENTLEMAN (45-65) who really prefers stunning blondes, is welcome by London étrangère. Box 2685.

PASSIONATE and considerate n/s professional man, fit, 48, with tall hunky build, seeks warm affectionate lady for discreet tenderness and good times together Photo appreciated. Northern England. Box 0687.

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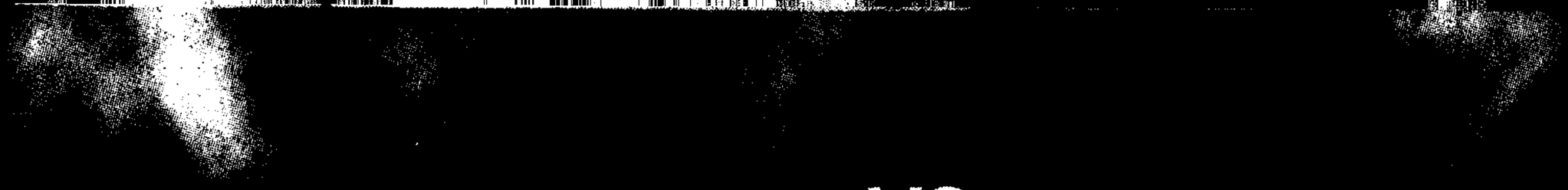

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